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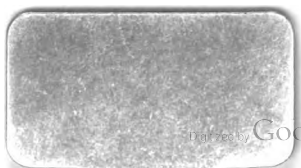
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Our Esther, by M.F.S.

Mary Seymour



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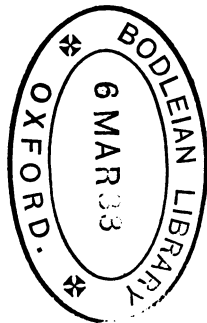


OUR ESTHER.

By M. F. S.,

AUTHOR OF "OUT IN THE COLD WORLD," "TOM'S CRUCIFIX," AND
OTHER TALES, "CATHERINE HAMILTON," "STORIES OF LIVES
OF THE SAINTS," "LEGENDS OF THE SAINTS," ETC., ETC.

" Lovest thou praise? The Cross is shame;
Or ease? The Cross is bitter grief."



R. WASHBOURNE,
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OUR ESTHER.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNEXPECTED LETTER.

JAMES GREENWAY and his wife Alice had been married more than thirteen years at the time that this story begins, but the cottage had never been brightened by a child's voice—except some chance visitor from among the juvenile neighbours—and all hope of such a blessing lay back among other things of the past.

But they were a happy couple in so far as this world went—the husband sober, industrious, kind—the wife thrifty and good-tempered. It is really wonderful sometimes to note the excellent qualities which exist in many who have no religious hope or feeling! it makes us realize how that one addition must

ennoble and perfect that which is already so fair to look on.

It was on one of the loveliest days of June that a letter arrived at the Greenways' cottage, a rare event in the daily lives of these simple working-folk who have not much need to write, nor much facility for doing it if the need existed. A lovely June day indeed—the foliage of the trees still keeping much of its spring freshness, the daisies and buttercups still brightening the fields, though the wild roses were peeping out in the hedges. Alice Greenway, standing at her cottage-gate for a minute or two in the sunshine, thought what a pretty village Hammersley was, and pitied those whose lot compelled them to be shut up in close towns.

She felt no interest in the postman's approach as she saw him coming nearer and nearer. When he stopped short just close to her, she thought it was for a chat; but to her surprise he held out a letter, and to her still greater surprise it clearly bore her husband's name:

“MR. JAMES GREENWAY,

“Hammersley, Kent.”

“Dear heart!” cried Alice, in her extreme astonishment, “I wonder who can have taken the trouble to write to us!”

“You’ll find that out if you look inside,” said the postman with a laugh. “Good-morning to you, missis.”

His advice was not immediately followed, for Mrs. Greenway seemed as if the cover of her letter possessed some special interest—if one could judge by the fact that she turned it round and round, examined the seal and the stamp, and convinced herself that the postmark was London.

“*London!* and I never was there in all my life; and James only went once for a day’s pleasuring, five years ago come August,” she said to herself. “It can’t be for him, surely—and yet the name is plain enough to read.”

She went in from the gate and sat down in her tidy little kitchen to consider afresh what this might mean, laying the letter carefully on the wooden table, and eyeing it much as if it was possible that it might vanish as unexpectedly as it had come.

“It can’t be from James’s brother’s wife’s sister, that went away to service soon after

we were married," she reflected, "for I never heard of her being in London; and if she was there, she'd have no call to write to me, seeing we never knew each other. Dear, dear! who could think of sending a letter to such as we!"

It was still some five minutes before she followed the postman's advice and broke the seal. When she did so, her bewilderment was in nowise diminished, for the writing was small, and not very clear, and Mrs. Greenway was but a poor scholar even under the easiest conditions.

"Now, if it had been large and plain, like the outside of the envelope, I might have made it out," she exclaimed. "As it is, beyond a word here and there that seems to have no meaning in it, I can't read it. I'll step round to Mrs. Barclay's at once, and maybe catch one of the children who has learned reading and writing at school—that is the best thing I can do."

She rose up and went out—there was no occasion in the quiet little village of Hammersley for locked doors—taking her way down the lane which led directly to the main

street, where Mrs. Barclay kept a small shop for the sale of almost anything which might be convenient to her neighbours to possess.

There was conscious dignity in Mrs. Greenway's look and bearing as she went her way—the dignity of one who has a London correspondent. It might be the news of some stroke of good fortune which that letter contained; it might tell of money left which would raise James above all need to work daily in his carpenter's shed; but as these solutions of the enigma passed through the woman's mind she forgot that there existed no one in the world who was at all likely to have endowed them with sudden means of independence.

“Good-morning, Mrs. Greenway! what makes you in such a hurry this morning?” cried a clear young voice. It startled her so that, as she was wont to say in relating the occurrence, you might have “knocked her down with a feather,” for at the first moment no one was visible, look which way she might; then a boy came clambering over a gate close by, and the terrified

woman grew calm as she recognised the Squire's son.

I ought to have told you before that Hammersley possessed its Squire, and its "great house;" not such a very great house as you and I should decide, but such things are comparative, and to the village people "Old Court" represented grandeur. There were three young Marshalls—frank, bright boys, who ran wild in their recreation times, when their tutor had relaxed his hold on them, and were on the most sociable terms with the poorer inhabitants of Hammersley. It was the eldest of these, an urchin of twelve years old, who had discerned Mrs. Greenway's bonnet from afar, and now came precipitately over the five-barred gate to inquire the reason of her hurried walk to the village at such an early hour.

"Dear! and I *am* glad I've met you, Master Ernest," she said, "for it's a good step to Mrs. Barclay's, and will throw me all behind with my work. Would you do me the favour, sir, to read me a letter that

came this morning, and has put me so about I scarcely know what I'm doing?"

"All right, give it here;" and Ernest Marshall held out his hand for the precious document.

"It's from London, sir," said Mrs. Greenway solemnly.

"Ah, so I see. Jolly place London! only wish I lived there! Will when I'm a man. Well, this *is* spelling!" and he burst into a laugh and began to read aloud:

"DERE MR. GREENWAY,

"this cums hopping to find you quite well as thank God it leves me at prezent only its poor Mary Parker as was wunce Mary Greenway as is very ill and like to die and you won't see her no more unless you come immejate. So no more at present from yours trewley,

"ANN BRIGGS."

"Ann Briggs!" cried the listener, "I never heard tell of *her*; but Mary Parker—why that is James's very own sister, as married a soldier years back, and went

away to foreign parts, and never since heard of! Mary very ill and like to die, and in London, too! well, this is news. What ever shall I do, Master Ernest?"

"Do!" and his eyes opened wide in surprise that she could see difficulty in so clear a case; "why cut up to London and see the poor thing of course. If you looked sharp, you might ride in to the town with Coleford; his cart comes along about this time. You'd catch the next train, and be there in three or four hours. Shall you remember the address? 2, Eagle Street, Stepney."

"Eagle Street, Stepney," repeated Mrs. Greenway mechanically; "but bless you, Master Ernest, I couldn't go to London. I've never been farther than Ashford in all my life, and I'm hard on forty years old."

"Oh, *that's* not much," said the boy. "If you were seventy, there would be some excuse; but forty and never seen London! well, it's time you did, and that's all I can say."

"I must go and speak to James," continued Mrs. Greenway, in a troubled voice; "for all

he can't bear to be hindered in his work, it's only right as he should hear this."

"Good-bye," cried the Squire's son, who was due at home in five minutes.

"Good-day to you, Master Ernest, and thank you," was the answer, and Mrs. Greenway turned back towards her home, for the workshop of "Hodges, carpenter and builder," with whom her James was foreman, lay nearer to the cottage than to Hammersley main street.

She could see him from a yard or two off, for he was near the open door—a finely-built man with an honest Saxon face, of whom any wife would be proud; but still there was a hard look about his mouth which seemed to say that, on occasions, he could make himself feared also. Alice was particularly conscious of this at the moment, for when they were a young couple he had laid down the law that he was never to be disturbed by "women-folk" during the working-hours; she only hoped that upon such an unusual occasion as this, when news had come from London of his long-absent sister, he would overlook the offence.

“James !” she said, coming up to the door ; and at her awe-struck whisper he turned with a heavy frown upon his face. “James, it’s not my fault I’ve come—it’s this,” and she held out the letter.

He flung down his plane, and came outside to read it ; but as he gathered the facts of the case his face relaxed and softened. “Mary dying—away up in London !” he exclaimed. “Mary dying, and wanting me, too. I wonder where’s that good-for-nothing husband of hers !”

The wife stood mutely waiting ; had she dared, she would have ventured an appeal against a London journey, but silence seemed safer.

“Get home, Alice,” said James gently ; “get home and make yourself ready to start soon after noon. I’ll speak a word to the master, and he’ll not grudge me a couple of days away from the workshop.”

“We’re to go to London !” said Alice tremblingly.

“Yes, we’re to go to London without losing any time,” he answered. “Do you think I’d let poor Mary lie there dying and wanting

me without starting off at once? It's none so far when all's said and done."

"Very well, James," and his wife turned away meekly, for, apart from her settled belief in his wisdom, she perceived that in the present instance their duty was clear. Nevertheless she was greatly disturbed by the prospect before her, and had scarcely gained her kitchen than her mingled feelings found vent in a burst of tears.

When she had recovered herself a little she glanced round with much the feeling of one who looks on dear and familiar objects for the last time.

The crockery on the dresser-shelves, the tins on the wall, the brass candlesticks on the mantelshelf—ah, they carried her mind back to the old days when she and James had been building their home-nest, this bought now, that bought later, money earned and put by carefully till it amounted to enough to make some other purchase. As she thought of these things she wondered into whose hands they would fall if she never came back to Hammersley alive.

For to venture on a railway journey was, in

poor Mrs. Greenway's opinion, to incur imminent danger of sudden death. Upon the few occasions when she had been obliged to entrust herself to the power of the locomotive, every whistle, every sound seemed to herald a catastrophe; and yet her journeys had been of the briefest—nothing approaching to the length of this journey to London.

And the risks and dangers of the great city itself, if safely reached, were terrible in her eyes. Here and there, on her quiet way through the world, she had culled items of news which, blended together, had fixed upon her mind the assurance that London was a place in which neither throats, pockets, nor principles were safe from violence; so it was scarcely surprising that she made her preparations for starting in much grief of heart, that her tears fell over the potatoes she had to pare for the noontide dinner, and that she sobbed outright upon the small bundle which formed their only luggage.

"I can as good as see myself brought in at the door a hopeless corpse, and laid out upstairs with bunches of southernwood round me!" she said to her nearest neighbour, one

Mrs. Jenkins, who had been called in to sympathize, and also to promise to keep her eye upon the outside of the cottage, and the key in some safe hiding-place which locked its *inside* possessions.

“ Ah, don’t take on so, my poor dear,” said Mrs. Jenkins, weeping a little in unison ; for she had been born and reared in Kent, and fully agreed that it was a perilous matter to pass the limits of one’s own county. “ Let’s hope you’ll be brought back safe home, as many are ; but I’m bound to own these railways seem chancy sort of things. If it were me, I’d rather trust to my legs and a lift in some cart between times.”

“ It wouldn’t do now when Mary is dying,” replied Mrs. Greenway, with a sorrowful shake of the head. “ I wouldn’t dare mention such a thing to James—and him so fond of her when they were children together, and giving up a good two days’ work as it is ! But if I never come back alive, you’ll be neighbourly enough to see that my silver teaspoons, and the china tea-service, and the best tea-tray don’t go to ruin through neglect, won’t you ?”

“To be sure, I’ll do anything that lies in my power,” said Mrs. Jenkins warmly. “We’ve always been good friends, you and I, since we were girls together; but don’t let your mind keep running on hopeless corpses, there’s a good creature. Please God, you’ll be back among us safe and well; and He’s over all, whether they’re far or whether they’re near.”

“Ah, that’s true,” said the other woman vaguely; her mind was still running on domestic things.

“Yes, it’s true,” continued Mrs. Jenkins, wishing to press her advantage; for in her simple fashion she was a God-fearing soul, and had often grieved over her neighbour’s indifference. “It’s true, and yet we’re inclined not to think much of how God is with us always, and that there’s no passing out of His sight, no matter how far we go. I’d say a prayer to Him if I were you, Mrs. Greenway; it would, leastways, quiet your mind.”

“Maybe it would,” was the answer; “but don’t say any more about it, for with one thing and another I’m flustered enough already. And here’s James, and I suppose he’ll be

for starting as soon as his bit of dinner's swallowed."

She was right in this conjecture, and the first train to London after noon saw the Greenways on their journey.



CHAPTER II.

NO. 2, EAGLE STREET.

LONDON was at its very best and brightest that beautiful afternoon. The sun was still shining when the travellers from Hammersley had got over the bustle of the terminus and were making their way to Stepney; but in Mrs. Greenway's judgment it was close, murky, dull. And as she turned the corner of the dingy street, where they expected to find her husband's sister, she said, "I don't wonder she's dying, poor thing; it's more wonder to me that anyone can live *here*."

It occurred to them both that they knew very little about the circumstances of the case—whether the "Ann Briggs" of the letter was the person to be asked for; however,

their doubts were set at rest by the appearance of a respectable-looking girl, who at the sight of them exclaimed, "Oh, it's the party that's ill you want, isn't it?—Mrs. Parker."

James Greenway was beginning to explain that he came by request received in a letter that morning, but she stopped him with a quick, "Oh, I know; it's all right. I wrote the letter for her seeing she was too low, and the little girl nothing better than a baby; she's been lodging with me and mother this three months."

"Little girl—three months!"—the man repeated the words as he stumbled up the dark stairs, followed by his wife. It seemed extraordinary to him that Mary should have a little girl, when all through the afternoon he had been thinking of her as she was in her childish days; it seemed stranger still that she should lodge three months in such a miserable place as that, and not send a message to him till she was dying.

It did not seem so very long since they had been boy and girl—a big boy and a tiny toddling girl, of whom he was told to

take such care! It did not seem so very long since they stood by their mother's bed, and she had joined their hands together and bidden them always love each other. He meant to work for pretty Mary, and protect her; but she was gay and merry, and could not bear the dulness of the sleepy little Kentish village. So she had gone off to a large town, and apprenticed herself to a dress-maker; and the next news that came was that she was married to a soldier, and going away from England at once.

Married at sixteen! James had been angry, and hurried off to Portsmouth as soon as he could get away, but it was too late; he only heard that his sister was gone—he only found that her husband bore an undesirable character.

From that day—it was fourteen years back—he had never heard her name until now. Fourteen years! why, Mary was a woman now of thirty; and yet he murmured to himself, “Poor lass! poor lass! it's young to die.”

He started back, though, as the girl of the house ushered him into that small, high-up room. Could this possibly be his pretty rosy sister? this emaciated woman, whose large

eyes met his so mournfully, and whose face seemed that of some one he had never seen before.

Perhaps he might have thought there was some mistake in his summons, only she apparently recognised him, and murmured, "James ! how kind—how good !"

He had never been in such a room before—never seen anyone looking so white and death-like since the far-off day when he had his mother's last kiss. He went up and took the wasted hand ; but he was so much at a loss what to do next, that it was some relief to beckon his wife forward from where she stood just inside the door.

"Here's my missus, and a right good one she's been this many a year. Alice Hamer she was before she was married ; you mind the name of Hamer, over at Grazeleigh, next village to ours, Mary ?"

"I am afraid—I forget so many things," said the sick woman. "It's long ago, James, since I saw Hammersley ; and I've been far away and had so much trouble, losing three children and my husband."

"There was something said about a little

girl by the young person that showed us up," said Mrs. Greenway, feeling it proper to take part in the conversation. "I'm fond of children, though it never pleased th' Almighty to give me one of my own," and she glanced round the room inquiringly.

"I've got one dear little girl—the last born," and the dark eyes filled with tears. "*Esther* she's called—just six years old, and like a woman for sense. Mrs. Briggs took her down for a bit, thinking it wasn't well for her to sit here all day; but she'll come directly."

"And how do you find yourself, Mary?" said James Greenway, taking a chair near to her pillow. "I hope you've had the doctor fetched."

"Oh yes; he's been here very often this last month."

"And doesn't he tell you that you want a little fresh air to get you round, my poor girl?"

She shook her head—she could not speak for her fast-falling tears.

"Come, come, don't frèt," said her brother kindly. "Me and the misuss are going to get a bed somewhere near by, and we shan't be starting home till to-morrow. Don't you

think you could come along with us? Hammersley air would do wonders for you."

"I wish I could—oh, how I should like it!" she exclaimed; "but it can't be, James. I was ill when I came to England three months ago; but working so hard to keep myself and Esther has been too much for me, and now I shall never be better."

"Don't, my dear, don't give way!" said Alice, greatly moved by her distress. "For the sake of the little girl, don't talk so."

"Ah, my little darling! my poor, pretty Esther!" sobbed the mother; and then with sudden energy she grasped her brother's hand and spoke swiftly—eagerly. "It's because of the child I wanted to see you, James. I knew when I got married secretly that it would anger you against me. For myself I never should have asked anything of you, but Esther—she's so good and so pretty, you'll be kind to her and give her a home till she's old enough to work; won't you, James? God will be sure to make it up to you in blessing."

"Ay, that I will," he answered, "and

glad——” but what more he might have said was stayed by his wife’s words.

“Don’t let a thought of the little one trouble you, you poor dying creature,” she cried, and tears streamed down her comely face. “There’s nothing been wanting to our home but a child to make us young again; and yours shall find a father and a mother in us, I promise you. I’d like to take you both down to Hammersley, though, to-morrow, and see if we couldn’t manage to bring you round. I’ve not much faith in doctors myself, and how some folks can take their rubbish, believing any good will come of it, is more than I can understand.”

“It’s neither air nor medicine that will do me good,” said Mary. “But my heart is lightened of a heavy load, knowing that my little girl will be taken care of. James, I’d like to say one word more. I was a giddy creature in the old times, but trouble taught me many things; it taught me, above all, that there’s only One who can help us much in life or death, and I hope I’ve made my peace with God long ago. You’ll teach Esther to be good? She’s been used to say her prayers

and such-like, but being such a little child, she might forget if there's no one to remind her of all she's learned right. You'll promise me that?—you and your wife," and the large eyes turned on both her companions.

There was an awkward silence. What were they to say—these people to whom God had never been more than a name, and a name rarely heard in their home, and only then as part of some thoughtless or unmeaning exclamation? At last Greenway spoke, but his words came slowly, and he looked confused.

"I don't know how it's come about," he said, "but somehow we haven't been nigh church or chapel these many years. I suppose it's through working hard all the week; one wants a bit of rest come Sunday. But you mustn't fret, Mary; if you don't get well again, and the little girl comes to us, we'll do our best to please you. There's the old Bible at home—mother's, you know—that we've so often looked at together, when you were such a little one, Mary! I'll get it down and learn her to read a bit as best I can."

A sigh broke from her—it seemed such a poor promise to trust to where her child was

concerned ! “ Mother’s Bible ! ” she said. “ Ah, how well I seem to see it before me ! Don’t you recollect, James, that I always wanted you to find me the picture of Christ in the storm, saying, ‘ Peace,’ to the winds and the waves ? ”

“ Yes, I do. And I liked Daniel in the den of lions best, and things of that sort. How long it seems ago, doesn’t it, Mary ? and I never should have thought of it if you hadn’t brought it all to my mind by talking of little Esther. Isn’t she coming to see her aunt and uncle ? ”

“ I fancied I heard her voice a minute ago,” she answered ; and as they ceased talking to listen, there certainly was the sound of a child’s footstep on the stairs, and next moment the door was pushed open, and a tiny creature with dark eyes and a wealth of fair waving hair walked in.

“ Mother, are you any worse ? ” she said, running forward ; but before she reached the bed, Mrs. Greenway had caught her up with an expression of admiration.

“ You pretty lamb ! ” she said ; “ don’t you know that I’m your aunt, and over there’s

your uncle James, as loves you dearly? Go and give him a kiss, darling; he's fond of little girls."

The child got down from this stranger's knee, and walked fearlessly round to the big man on the other side.

"I know about you if you are Uncle James," she said. "I always say something in my prayers for you."

"Bless your little heart!" exclaimed Greenway. "I've got no nice little girl down in my home in the country; I want to take you there, my dear—you and mother."

"The country," she repeated. "That means trees and fields—the sea, perhaps?"

"Well, no; I can't say as we're near the sea in our part of Kent," he answered. "But there's fields and trees and flowers enough to please you."

"I shall like to come," said the child; and then climbing gently on the bed, she said, "Mother, can you go there? Will it tire you too much? It would be very nice after this."

"Suppose you go first, darling," said the sick woman; but little Esther shook her

head and said "no," she would not "leave mother."

They wisely spoke of other things then, seeing that the child's lips trembled, and she was scarcely able to restrain a burst of grief; and very soon the Greenways took their leave, for they had to seek a lodging in this unattractive, unfamiliar London. But before they went, James inquired into his sister's wants, and finding she expressed none, took care to question the landlady, the result being the arrival of several little things which the doctor had ordered, and poor Mrs. Parker had not been able to afford.

"She's mortal bad," said the man, when he and his wife were lodged for the night a few doors from Mary. "There's a look about her that brings back my mother—just at the last."

"Yes, and talking so religious, that's a very bad sign," Mrs. Greenway remarked. "I've noticed it before in sick people, and I never knew one who talked so as got over it—never!"

"Tut, tut, Alice!" said her husband, half smiling; "you haven't been used to that kind

of talk. There's a many people that I've known live to a good old age for all they've been to church regular, and got Scripture pretty well at their fingers' ends. There was my mother—as pious as ever woman could be!”

“Ah, but she died after all,” exclaimed Mrs. Greenway, who did not easily relinquish an opinion.

“Well, then there's our neighbour, Mrs. Jenkins. She's a good church-going soul.”

“And laid up regular every winter with inflammation, to say nothing of rheumatics, whenever the weather sets in damp! *She* won't last long, it's plain.”

“Ah, wife, you're set upon having your own way,” said Greenway; “but I'm thinking it isn't religion that makes the difference in people's health—except, indeed, by keeping them sober and honest it may keep them in the world a bit longer! And it came into my mind when poor Mary was talking so earnest-like about the little girl that you and me might be all the happier and the better if we were more like her.”

“We've been happier than most as it is,

and enjoy better health than many," replied Alice calmly. "But I'm always agreeable to anything you wish, so long as it's in reason," she added.

Nothing more was said between them just then, but this village carpenter was pondering many things in his heart, which had never found place there before, and which had been born within him while he sat by his dying sister; and a sort of resolution was in his mind to try "being religious," but he had no more idea how to begin than some untaught heathen.

Ah, there are many heathen in our fairest and most peaceful villages!—there is an ignorance (sometimes a depth of miserable sin) in rose-covered cottages which could not be surpassed in the very worst of the slums and alleys of our great metropolis. So, in a purely natural manner, both James and Alice Greenway were honest-living people, but as yet their hearts were all untouched by light and grace.

When they went to see poor Mary Parker the next morning, she seemed better, brighter, even stronger—it made them urge her anew to go down with them to Hammersley; but as

she could not be persuaded, it sent them home in tolerable cheerfulness, after promising another visit before long.

"It's an awful place is London," said Mrs. Greenway, when her neighbour came out to greet her. "It's enough to be the death of anyone that's not born to it! But we're safe home, which is more than I expected when I turned this key and heard my own door close behind me."

"Well, it's a good thing over," was the reply; "and pleasant, too, to feel you've seen a place folks talk so much of, and got back to Hammersley none the worse."

"Ah, but mayhap we shall have to make the journey again before long," and then Alice gave a detailed account of all that had happened. Mrs. Jenkins was the mother of several children, and cried heartily at the thought of the loss which was hanging over little Esther.

Two days later, a second letter was brought to the Greenways' cottage, and it told of a death, sudden at the last, but peaceful. "The little gurl is krying, and taking on dreddful,"

wrote Ann Briggs. "She says she wants her unkel james."

When James Greenway read this, he started off for London, not even waiting for his wife's company. Thus it was that little Esther came to Hammersley.



CHAPTER III.

THE OLD PICTURE BIBLE.

IN three months from the time of the little orphan's adoption, she was the pet and the darling of the village. Some of the people remembered her mother, and would, for her sake, have made much of the child; but she was a sweet, engaging little creature, whom everyone must surely love, unless their hearts were cold indeed.

To Alice Greenway it was as if some new life had come—the full happy life to which, in her earliest married days, she had sometimes looked forward; and as no child had ever come to bless her, no little lips had called her by the sweet name of mother, Esther seemed in all respects her very own.

It was something to see tall James Greenway walking proudly through Hammersley,

with that tiny hand clinging to his large one, and the child's voice raised to its highest as she called his attention to the different people or things which seemed attractive to her.

It was something to see Alice Greenway's pride when the little girl was dressed and her blond hair had been made to shine like satin by much brushing. And when she spoke of Esther to her neighbours, it was as if no child so good and obedient, and withal so pretty, had ever walked this earth before.

She was very intelligent for her short seven years of life. She could describe to her aunt and uncle the ways and looks of the "funny people" with whom her earliest memories were associated; but no questioning would ever draw from her a word about her dead father, for she only answered, "I promised mother not to tell you of him."

Other promises also weighed upon her conscience, and from the first night of her arrival, when Mrs. Greenway would have hurried her to bed because she looked so white and wan, she insisted on kneeling down to say her prayers for the same reason, that she "promised mother."

"She looks like a little picture, kneeling there," said Alice, in relating this circumstance to her husband. "I'll leave the door ajar some night just so as you can see her without her knowing. It's pretty to hear her say, 'Please, God, bless uncle and aunt.'"

James was quite willing to take this suggestion, but the sight of that small kneeling figure and the reverent face, the sound of that earnest, serious voice so touched his heart, that he went back to his seat by the kitchen fire, drawing his rough hands across his eyes which had grown dim with sudden tears. For there was this difference between him and his wife. He had learned *some* religious truth from his mother—not very well or clearly, for she could only give out of her own little store of simple faith which accepts all but cannot explain—and though the long years had obliterated so very much, he still remembered that she had impressed on him the fact that we must pray for every blessing we need from God.

Alice had been one of the Hamers—a family with the ignorant prejudice against religion which we have already seen in her own con-

versation. To them it seemed, as she said, a matter which referred to death and not to life, a thing quite proper for sick-beds, and as much belonging to them as the visits of a doctor, but otherwise of no practical use.

Though she admired little Esther's obedience to her dead mother, and thought there was a pretty sound in the words of prayer to God uttered by that childish voice, it seemed to her as if all this was something belonging to seven years old, something to "grow out of," as much as shoes and stockings and other garments would be grown out of.

She was surprised then to find her husband plunged into such serious thoughts by listening to a child's prayer.

"Alice," he had said to her, when she came back that evening after seeing Esther safely tucked up in bed, "it's come back to me what I promised poor Mary that day we went to see her for the last time. I can as good as hear her voice again, begging me to keep the little one up to what she had learned of good things, and I'll not break my word. There's the old Bible somewhere about; just give it here and I'll have a look over it,

and see if anything comes clear to my mind which I can teach Esther."

"You'll have to reach it down yourself then, James, for it's too high for me; it's on the top shelf of the dresser, safe enough since the last cleaning."

Greenway rose at once and easily possessed himself of the old worn book—such a copy of God's Word as, perhaps, some of us have not seen, and those who have, will associate it as something dear in a long-past childhood. The type, the paper, were different indeed to what we get now; the rough woodcuts which illustrated various passages were almost grotesque. But this rough carpenter was not the man to note its deficiencies, and so to him the pictures in his mother's old Bible were just as good as works of art.

Mrs. Greenway had never turned its pages. She considered it a book which ought to be reserved for death-beds, and meanwhile carefully dusted at proper intervals; not put into everyday use!

She crossed over now and stood by her husband's side, looking on as he opened upon the different illustrations, and asking ques-

tions which clearly proved that this was new ground she was treading.

"Dear! and whatever's that?" she exclaimed, with undisguised surprise. "A man just in the very act of getting out of that big whale's mouth. There can't be truth in it, James, for it is clear against nature that anyone'd come out of a fish alive; and he *looks* alive," added Mrs. Greenway with a thoughtful glance.

"It is true, though; for there's nought but truth in the whole Book," said James firmly. "That's——" he gave a look at the letter-press to make quite sure, and then went on rapidly. "It's Jonah, and it was a kind of a—well, a *meracle* as I may say, by which God taught him what he'd done wrong."

"I shouldn't like such meracles to be done nowadays," said the wife gravely. "It would give one a dreadful turn to see, if it happened to a neighbour—but then we don't have whales in these parts."

Greenway had turned over many pages by this time; he wanted to find the one which his dead sister had reminded him of as being her own childhood's favourite, and he had no

clear idea of which end of the big book it might be found in.

"There it is!" he cried, now in evident pleasure. "The little boat pitching right and left on the top of the big waves, that Mary always wanted me to turn up to. And there's Christ—Him that's coming to the side and stretching out His hand, Alice. There ought by rights to be another picture, showing how, when he did that and said a word, it grew calm."

"Well, how she could have liked to look at *that* is more than I can understand," remarked the astonished woman. "That's what I call a picture to keep one awake at nights, leastways if they've anyone belonging to them who's in the seafaring line, which, I'm thankful to say, we haven't."

Greenway closed the old Book now, and sat back in his chair.

"I must read a bit of it now and again with little Esther," he said thoughtfully. "The pictures are all very well, but it's the reading that's the most consequence, so my poor mother used to say."

"If it's all about whales swallowing people

for doing wrong, and shipwrecks and storms, it'd be like to make the poor child dream bad o' nights, James," said his wife. "I'd think twice, if I was you, before I read her those sort of things."

"Ah, but there's a deal more," he answered—"pretty stories about people being cured of their sicknesses, and dead raised to life; about the shepherds watching their sheep at night, and hearing a beautiful song up in the heaven over their heads. The sight of the old Book brings back to me a lot of things that's in it, though not to say clear."

Mrs. Greenway shook her head doubtfully. If pleasure could come to her "master" and little Esther, she would be most unwilling to interfere with it, yet her husband's explanations did not carry to her mind a conviction that the result of his efforts would be desirable.

The first experiment was not made upon the evening of the following day, for the little girl's bed-time came so soon after her uncle's return from work; but on the next Sunday, Greenway called Esther to him directly after breakfast, and said he had something to tell her

"Do you mind that time when me and your

aunt came to London to see your poor mother ?” he began ; and the child nodded, and fixed her eyes earnestly on him. “ Well, I told her that if ever you came to Hammersley to be our little girl, I’d get out your grandmother’s old Bible and show you the pretty pictures and read you a bit. Would you like that, Esther ?”

“ Oh yes !” she cried. “ Where is my grandmother’s old Bible, uncle ?”

“ It’s up there,” and he pointed to the shelf to which the tidy Alice had carefully returned it ; “ but I’ll reach it down presently.”

“ Are the letters large, uncle ?” said Esther. “ I can read some easy words when the letters are large. I was learning nicely before mother got so ill.”

“ They’re fairish,” answered Greenway. “ Not so large as some, and not so small as others I’ve seen. I’ll show you, Esther.”

They sat down together, the little one on his knee, with the Bible open before them on the kitchen table, and first he turned to the picture of Christ in the storm, having taken the precaution of marking the place when last he found it.

"There, my pretty!" he cried. "That's what your poor mother called her favourite picture when she was no bigger than you."

Esther's glance was not altogether that of satisfaction. Her aunt, who was crossing the kitchen at the moment with a pie which was to be put in the oven, noticed this, and stood still.

"Did mother really like it very much?" said the child. "I have been on the sea, but it never looked at all like this—never once."

"Ah, but you weren't ever on *this* sea," said Greenway. "That's what makes all the difference, Esther; it isn't to be expected that one sea is exactly like another."

"No; perhaps that *is* it," and Esther looked thoughtfully at her uncle. "Please turn over to another."

One by one he showed her all, but was disappointed that no expression of pleasure came over her little face.

"Don't you care for 'em, darling?" he said, looking rather cast down. "I thought you'd like to see the old Bible."

"Read to me, uncle; I'd like *that*," she answered; and Greenway began searching for

something he could manage. When all was so new and strange, a choice must needs be difficult. Esther, however, was ready with a suggestion.

"I'd like a Psalm first—one of the little ones," she said—"and then about Christ and the children."

"Psalm! Why, that's something that's sung, Esther," remarked her aunt, who had come in again from the back premises.

"Yes, I know; but there's Psalms to *read* as well, Aunt Alice," she answered; "I can find the place, too;" and after a little difficulty she did so, saying, "Now, please begin, uncle."

Being but a poor scholar, and impeded in the present instance by a good deal of shyness, James Greenway's progress through that short Psalm, which begins, "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my aid," was slow indeed; having finished it, he leaned back in his chair with the manner of one who has concluded a painful duty.

"Are you very tired, uncle dear?" said Esther prettily. "Can't you read a bit more?"

"Oh yes, dear, if it pleases you," he answered: for to please Esther he would have done something far harder. "What shall it be?"

"Oh, about Christ," she answered; "one of the pretty Testament stories, uncle. Which do you like best yourself?"

"Suppose you tell me the names of some of them," he answered cautiously. "It's long since I read any, my dear; and my memory's short at the best of times, except about my work."

"Well, there's the Bethlehem story—the little Baby born in a manger, and no one knew He was Christ except His Mother. The shepherds went to see Him after, though, because the angels told them; and the wise men from the East went next; but no one else seemed to care."

"That sounds very pretty," said Greenway. "What else is there?"

"Oh, so much, I can hardly tell you," she exclaimed. "About Christ going to the Temple when He was twelve years old; and about when He grew up and did wonderful things, and was so kind to everyone, even

sinners. And then there's about the cruel way people treated Him, and His dying on the Cross. I always cry at *that*," she added.

"Well then, we won't have it," said Greenway decidedly. "We can't have any crying over mother's old Book; I only got it down to please you, my dear."

"Don't you ever feel ready to cry when you think of Christ dying *so*?" she asked, looking almost reproachfully at him. "For He did it for you and me and all of us; so we ought to be sorry."

"Well, if ever I heard the like!" cried Mrs. Greenway. "What does the child mean, James?"

"She's in the right," he answered. "I've heard it long ago, though I don't know how to clear it up to you, Alice. Dying on a Cross, a thief on each side of Him—here it is as natural as possible," and he turned up to the picture. "But we won't read that, Esther, darling; I wouldn't like to see you cry. Let's have about the little Baby in the manger."

Esther was not very long this time in finding the place she wanted, and as her uncle

plodded through the chapter she followed him with rapt attention, prompting him now and then when he paused before a word.

"I *should* like to have been alive then," said the child, when there was a pause. "Mother said it is better now, because He has died and gone to heaven to make ready for us ; and perhaps we *might* have been like the wicked people who would not believe He was the Son of God."

"Maybe we might," said Greenway, feeling it a safe remark ; but Esther looked rebukingly at him.

"Oh, uncle, do you *really* think so ?" she cried. "Could you have been like cruel Herod, and wished to kill the dear little Jesus, or like the people who nailed Him on His Cross ?"

"Well, no, I don't believe I could," answered Greenway, "seeing it always goes against the grain with me to set my foot on even a beetle. No, Esther ! I think I'm pretty safe in saying I wouldn't take the life of any fellow-creature, no matter how badly he'd used me."

"Mother used to say that if we did not love

Christ now, we were as bad as those Jews, because we have been taught who He is, and we know all about His dying for us, and they did not. You do love Him, I suppose, uncle?"

"Why not, little Esther?" he answered confusedly, not knowing how to reply to her.

"I am glad you do. I only thought it so funny you never went to church; because you're not ill, like poor mother. I suppose you say your prayers when I'm asleep, Uncle James?"

He *could* not tell her Yes, he *would* not tell her No. Starting up from his seat and setting her gently on the floor, he exclaimed, "Why, there's the bells going. 'Calling the people to church,' as me and poor Mary used to say. Shall you and I go to church, Esther? It's a fine day for late September."

"Oh yes, please;" and the child danced round him in her pleasure, then bounded out of the kitchen to beg "Aunt Alice" to get her ready at once.



CHAPTER IV.

FINDING THE WAY.

“**W**ELL, if this doesn't beat all ever I see that's wonderful!” said Mrs. Greenway to herself, as from her gate she watched her husband and little Esther walking in the direction of the old ivy-covered church. “The child fairly turns him round her finger; however, I wouldn't say a word to hinder him going if it's to please her. I mind the time when I used to stop outside and hear them strike up singing, myself. I've something else to do now, though.”

Meanwhile the carpenter was trying to obtain some information about church-going, without a too candid betrayal of his ignorance.

“Esther dear,” he said, “I s'pose you used to go to church often with your mother on Sundays.”

"Always, uncle, till she had to lie in bed, and then there was no one to take me."

"And I s'pose you haven't only been to one church then, but to a-many."

"Well, not many," said the child; "but more than one."

"And were they all just alike—those you've been to, dear?" he answered.

"Oh no," she cried, in surprise. "Everyone was different, I think. Of course, some were big churches, and some were little, and some were more like rooms; but I don't mean that was all—the prayers and singing never seemed the same, uncle."

"That's queer, too," responded Greenway. "One can never know what's going to be done, once one gets inside. I wonder now if I shall find our church service as long as it seemed to me when I was a boy—it were powerful long in those days, I plainly recollect."

Esther was spared any occasion of reply, for they had just reached the gate leading into the churchyard, and it was amidst a good many of the Hammersley folk that the carpenter entered the old building, which he had not seen the inside of since his childhood—he

had to stoop his head now to pass in at the low doorway.

Hammersley was not a place where changes would have been popular, and the church had been submitted to no process of renovation or re-decoration since Greenway's boyhood. There were the forms set apart for the school-children, the pews with high sides like boxes, the two small stained-glass windows, on which he used to ponder when the sermon grew long and tedious. There was the squire's pew, which took up one side of the chancel, commanding a good view of the congregation; there were the tablets on the walls, whose black lettering recorded the names of men and women once honoured in the village, but long dead and gone.

The first part of the service seemed to slip by very quickly, for James was thinking of the old days; but when the people began to sing, it recalled him to the present, and he put out his hand to help Esther mount upon the seat, which brought her more on a level with the other worshippers. The child seemed attentive and happy, and looked at him now and then with approval; and by dint of memory,

combined with a close watch upon the movements of others, he managed very well. The only time when his little niece cordially disapproved of him was, when the vicar went up into the pulpit, for at that juncture "Uncle James" carefully folded his blue cotton handkerchief for the protection of his head from the hard wood of the pew, and slept until the conclusion.

It was a glorious autumn Sunday. "Let us have a walk towards the wood, there's time enough," said Greenway, when they came out of church; and he led little Esther onwards, pointing out to her the ripening blackberries and the reddening haws, and the active rabbits, running across the open glades and darting as quickly back into their hiding-places. By-and-by they came to the hazel-bushes, and the child laughed as the tall man raised his arm and brought down a cluster which some one else, perhaps, had passed by as quite unattainable. Still, withal, they were very quietly happy, for the sweet Sunday calm seemed hanging over the old wood, and neither Greenway nor his small

companion appeared to be disposed for very much talking.

As they neared the cottage, its mistress was standing at the gate with an anxious expression on her usually calm face. The Jenkins family had returned from church so long before, that she began to attribute her husband's delay to some untoward accident.

"The child must be tired to death," she said, when she heard of the long walk. "Come right in, Esther, and get your dinner; it's been ready to set on table this ten minutes."

"Oh, I'm not hungry," said the little thing. "It's been so nice, Aunt Alice. Will you come next Sunday?"

Mrs. Greenway valued the invitation as a compliment. It was one of the many instances wherein Esther showed what the Hammersley people termed "such pretty manners." Still she was not tempted to accept it.

"Who'd see to the dinner if I was running off to the wood, I'd like to know!" she answered good-humouredly.

"Oh, we wouldn't go to the wood if there wasn't time," said Esther. "I wish you went

to church with us, Aunt Alice, and then we would come straight home as soon as it was over."

"Bless you, love, I'm not sure as I should like it when I got there! The singing might be all very well, but the preaching and the praying would be too much for me; and my mind would be running on the dinner and all sorts of things."

But the little girl was in nowise disconcerted, and she stretched out her hand across the table in her earnestness, repeating, "I wish you would—oh do, Aunt Alice, to please me!"

"Well, well, I'll see about it," said her aunt kindly: "some Sunday when there's cold meat in the house and a pie baked overnight;" and with this indefinite assurance Esther had to be content.

That evening when the carpenter and his wife were alone by the fireside, they talked a good deal of this little adopted child of theirs.

"Alice," said the man, after a pause, "I've been turning things over in my head to-day that don't often come there, and it seems clear

to me that it's no chance which makes them happen as they have done. There's many a feeling came into my heart to-day, such as I've not known since my poor mother died. Ah, wife, we've been all in the wrong, you and I! We've got a tidy home and every comfort that plain working-people can wish for; but we've never given a thought to God, Who, 'tis said, gives us all we have—'tis a wonder He hasn't been hard on us."

His tone had a strange earnestness, almost sadness in it. It impressed his wife powerfully, and she answered, "Well, James, if you think it's best to be religious, I suppose you must be in the right. We're getting on in life, and there's no saying what may happen. But what is it we've got to do?"

"Well, there you puzzle me," said Greenway seriously. "I must think it over and see if I can call to mind what my poor mother used to teach me and Mary when we were little ones. All I feel is that Esther has come to us as a sort of teacher, showing me, unconscious like, that there's something more to think of than this life. For all I've set store on my good name, Alice, it'd fare badly with me if I

was called to die as I am—I see it plainly. And life's a chancy sort of thing—there's many a younger man taken off at a shorter warning."

"I'm sure you've always been a good husband and a good neighbour, James," said Alice, beginning to shed tears freely, for such unusual conversation troubled her, and produced the most gloomy forebodings. "And as for carpentering—well, if I was on my dying-bed, I wouldn't be afraid to say that if you left Hodges, t'would be long indeed before he got such another foreman."

"Well, I do my best," said Greenway; "and I'm not saying that a good name is a thing to be despised. All the same, there's something wanting to you and me, wife—and it's religion."

"I'm sure I'd make myself conformable to anything if I saw my way clear," she began. "What with one thing and another, it seems as if I hadn't time for church-going; but if that'd make you happy, I wouldn't deny you it, James—only——"

"Stop a bit," said Greenway. "There's a word come to me that our little lass let fall this

morning, wife. 'We must ask God to give us what we want,' says she; and though I don't rightly know how to ask Him, I'm thinking He'll see I want to do my best;" and lowering his voice, the carpenter put his hands together on the kitchen table and said, "I ask God to make me a religious man."

Mrs. Greenway shook her head doubtfully, not prepared to echo the supplication of which she understood so little; but she made no further remark, and only scrutinized her husband's ways and looks rather narrowly during the next few days, to see whether any visible result came out of this extraordinary state of mind.

The only thing, however, which was noticeably different was, that James seemed fond of reaching down the old Bible in the evening, and scanned its pages narrowly, sighing now and then as over some fresh difficulty. When Sunday came he started off for church at the first summons of the bells, and when a week or two had passed over their heads, he persuaded Alice to get her household work done, and to keep him and little Esther company.

The effect upon her seemed, however, doubt-

ful; her chief interest centring in the dress and demeanour of the other members of the congregation. After one or two experiments, she announced her wish to be left at home.

"I don't know how it is," she explained; "but I can't say as I feel any better for church-going. My mind isn't in the prayers, nor it isn't in the preaching. It keeps running on what I've had to do through the week, or what I'm going to be about in the week to come. I'm fittest to stay in and see to you having a nice hot dinner, James; but if you and Esther'd rather go to church, I've nothing to say against it, I'm sure."

"You'll get more used to it in time," responded the carpenter. "Leastways, when I catch myself thinking of the workshop, I try and remember that a man at my age can't expect to take to new ways without a deal of trouble—it's much as it would be learning a new trade. But then if, after all's said and done, the new ways are the *best* ways, one mustn't mind if they don't sit easy at first; and I'm clear on this point, wife, that we're in the right of it, though we don't quite understand it altogether."

"Well, yes, I suppose you're right in that," replied Alice; "and then it's easier for you than me, because you learned your Catechism and your Bible when you were little."

"What a wild young chap I was!" said Greenway musingly. "Many's the time I've seen tears in poor mother's eyes when she was troubled about me, and many's the time I've heard her say that it was well for a boy as had a father."

"Depending on whether he was a good one," suggested the wife. "There's Stevens—it seems to me his boys couldn't learn anything but harm of *him*."

The carpenter, however, did not seem inclined to discuss the bad qualities of Stevens; his thoughts had travelled back to his own past.

"When our little Esther is saying over her hymns so pretty," he went on, "I could most fancy it was her mother at the same age. We must take care of Esther, wife, and see she doesn't turn giddy and wilful, as Mary did when she got on a bit. She saw for herself, poor thing, the trouble that came of it."

"I don't see that we could do better by the child if she was our own," said Mrs. Greenway. "I'm sure I feel the same as if she had been with us always; and she's such a tractable little thing, that no one could help being fond of her."

"She's right enough now," answered Greenway; "but it troubles me sometimes thinking how little we're fit to have a child watching and copying us, and expecting us to teach her right. And there's no one to learn of, as far as I can see," he added.

The conversation was checked by the entrance of a neighbour, whose purpose seemed to be nothing more than to give a piece of news: one of the larger houses of Hammersley, which had been long untenanted, was taken at last, the board advertising it "To Let" already removed, and rumours were floating of immediate repairs being commenced.

In some places no special interest would have attached to the facts, but Hammersley was one of the districts in which the population does not increase, it *goes away*: thus there was almost excitement among the vil-

lagers at the prospect of unknown "gentry" settling among them.

"A lady and gentleman—no family—so they say," was the woman's statement. "It seems a pity for only two people to come to a place like Uplands."

"There'd be the servants," said Mrs. Greenway; "and maybe they'd keep a deal of company if, as you say, they come from London. It seems strange to think that Uplands is let at last—it must have stood empty a couple of years."

"More than that," said the visitor. "It's a good three years since our Lizzie went to place, and I always hoped to get her as under-housemaid at Uplands, so I made bold to go and speak to the lady. She said that if they were not just leaving Hammersley, Lizzie should have had a trial, and a week after that they were off to London. It's a full three years, neighbour Greenway, since Uplands has stood empty."

Before the close of another day there was little else talked of in Hammersley besides the expected arrival of new inhabitants; the general interest seemed to run all the higher

because such scant information could be gained about them, and the work of renovation was eagerly watched by men, women, and children. It was November before "Uplands" assumed a *habitable* look outside, while within there was every sign of active preparation. It came out then that the name of the tenants was Farley, that there was only a gentleman and his wife, that they came from London, and were very pleasant elderly people.

Mrs. Greenway's acquaintance with the great metropolis was, as we already know, of the most limited nature, and, imagining that Mr. and Mrs. Farley could only come from some such confined neighbourhood as that in which poor Mary Parker had lived and died, she was prepared to see two invalids, who should present a painful contrast to the healthy-looking inhabitants of Hammersley.

When, therefore, she perceived a stout comely lady of, perhaps, sixty years issuing from the gate of Uplands in the company of a fine-looking old gentleman of about the same age, it was a surprise; nor was she easily convinced that they were indeed the new-comers.

Soon the whole place rang with news about

Mr. and Mrs. Farley. They had a little chapel, so it had been found out; and on Sundays anyone from the village would be allowed to go there. "And there's pictures and statts," said the gossips, "such as never was in Hammersley before."

Country-people are not, as a rule, inclined to look with favour on new-comers or new customs, and few indeed of the Hammersley folk were pleased to hear such tidings connected with Uplands. Why couldn't the Farleys go to the church just as the squire's family did? they asked each other; but that mystery was solved by the still more alarming nature of the second report. *They were Papists!*

Little Esther was playing with a favourite kitten when this was told in the Greenways' kitchen. She put "Sandy" down at once, and catching at her aunt's apron said, "What are Papists?"

"Did ever I hear such a child for questions!" cried Alice. "She's that sharp, you'd never believe me, Mrs. Perkins" (Mrs. Perkins had brought the tidings), "catching up everything. Papists, my dear—well, they're no

good. I never thought as the day would come for Uplands to be took by Papists. You've seen the boys a-carrying Guy Fawkes round on the fifth of November, and a-burning of him after on the green? Well, that's to do with Papists, though I can't rightly say how—they used to try and make disorder in the country, I've heard tell; but you wouldn't understand, being so little, Esther."

"I should like to see the pretty chapel," said the child; "I shall ask uncle to go there on Sunday and take me."

She did make this request, and James Greenway did not refuse it, though his wife reproached him rather severely for his compliance.

"It'll make folks dislike you so as never was," she said; "I shouldn't wonder if it made words between you and Master Hodges, seeing he's more set against these new-comers than anyone in all Hammersley. I wouldn't do it James, not even to please the child."

With the natural pride and strong will of his nature, no argument could have been more powerful to induce Greenway to make an appearance in the little chapel, the outside cross

of which had already attracted as much of a crowd as Hammersley could muster ; to preserve his sister's child, however, from some unknown but possible perils, he insisted on going for the first time alone.

Esther was a docile little creature, and though disappointed she was silent ; her desire for her uncle's return was, however, very keen, and it troubled her somewhat that he disclosed next to nothing except his determination to go again.

"And you shall go with me," he added, "for 'twould please your little eyes to see the candles and the flowers, even if you couldn't make out what was doing. 'Tis the first time I've been to church without getting drowsy."

When Esther was in bed that evening, Mrs. Greenway heard much more than this.

"There were a *something* in all of it as I can't forget," said James seriously ; "but 'twas the sermon which fairly beat all ever I heard for plainness. 'Twas as if the good gentleman were looking in our hearts, and a-dragging out the sins in 'em for us to see how bad they were ! I can tell you, Alice, I felt for all the world as if I was brought before God, and

He was looking me through and through, and bringing all the past to my mind ! I couldn't fairly hold up my head for the shame I felt. And then after a bit he began to tell us of Christ, and what He'd done for us, spite of all we'd done against Him. I could see then as clear as daylight, that though I'd been always a sober hard-working man, I'd no reason to be satisfied with myself, seeing I'd lived for all as if there'd been no God over us. But the best of all was, Alice, that I heard this morning what I'd got to *do* ; and that was just the thing that I have had so many a doubt about lately. 'You want to do right,' so says the gentleman, 'and the way seems dark, for you have no teacher;' and then he shows as plain as plain can be that God wouldn't leave us so bad off as that, seeing it wouldn't be as I may say fair on us. 'The Church of Christ, the Holy Catholic Church, will be your guide ; there you will learn what God expects you to do ; there you may get the grace and the help you want,' were his words, as near as my memory serves me ; and as I listened, I found myself a-saying, 'Then a Catholic I'll be, whatever happens,

for I like anything that's clear and straightforward."

Mrs. Greenway had been thinking with pride what a great matter it was to be able to tell the subject of a sermon off-hand as James was doing; but the climax had been quite unexpected, and her alarm was real. Being, however, a practical body, she contented herself with a passing exclamation of surprise, and began getting his supper ready.

"He'll soon have his mind straying off to something else," she reflected; "it isn't in reason that a sensible man like my James'd take up Catholic ways in earnest, and let himself down in the eyes of them as knew him when he was a boy."

Though he said no more to his wife, Greenway sat up far into the night thinking out the subject which had impressed him. He had persuaded Alice to go to rest, and leave him by the fireside, and then he began looking back—back upon the godlessness and prayerlessness which now pressed on him like a heavy burden, back upon hitherto forgotten follies and sins which seemed suddenly clear to his mind as if committed yesterday. His later

life came next: well, in the sight of the Hammersley people it had been a praiseworthy one; and yet in surveying it, he could understand that God's view is very different to man's view of right and wrong. His conscience was living now, awakened suddenly, strangely tender; and he who had never been troubled by a thought or fear of death, felt that it would be a terrible thing to be called before a Judge who knew everything concerning his past, and needed no witness of the many times His laws had been overstepped.

Happily, however, he had heard something more in that morning's sermon than of the consequences of sin. It had been clearly put before him, that if sins are great, the love which pardons is far greater; that if God is just, the mercy He extends is even stronger than justice. He had learned that a way had been planned by which man can be reconciled to the Almighty; that the Blood of Christ can be poured upon the guilty soul, as truly and as efficaciously as if it fell from His bleeding, suffering body on the Cross. He had learned that amidst all the doubt and bewilderment of life, there is light in the Church of Christ, to

show the way to the heavenly kingdom ; and though James Greenway as yet knew nothing of sacraments, of doctrine, of Catholic duty, it was enough for him that he knew where to find a teacher, and again and again he murmured to himself, " I'll be a Catholic, no matter what comes of it ;" and with that resolution firmly fixed in his mind, he lay down to rest at last.



CHAPTER V.

THE RESULT OF A DECISION.

IN a village like Hammersley, it would be impossible for anyone to keep secret his habits and customs from the eyes of his neighbours. It was, therefore, soon known that James Greenway and his little niece were to be seen taking their way as regularly as Sunday came round to the tiny chapel at Uplands; and in consequence of this, a species of petty persecution assailed him. He cared far less for this than for the disapproval of his wife. She would willingly have conformed to his first desire of "being religious," if by so doing she stood committed to nothing more serious than an occasional appearance in the parish church, though even then she would have been fearful lest it might be the immediate forerunner of ill-

ness and death. But to take part with those she called Papists—a people solely associated in her mind with ideas of burning and bloodshed—was a far different, and indeed an alarming matter, and Alice Greenway did not hesitate to affirm that ruin would soon be the result.

The man himself was passing through a great change—the change from utter indifference to concern for his salvation; and as he saw more and more plainly the only way in which that salvation could be secured, he cast from him all thought of the temporal difficulties which might supervene—perhaps, indeed, he hardly realized them.

Others besides himself were frequent attendants at the Catholic services, drawn there by a sense of life and reality which had been lacking under the old Vicar of Hammersley; some were there who for years had never been seen in church, yet so far, only Greenway the carpenter was fully resolved to become in deed and truth a Christian after the pattern of Christ Himself. Once resolved on this step, his was not the character to know hesitation; as simply as a child he

put himself under the necessary instruction, as simply also as a child he accepted all that he heard ; for did he not need a teacher ? and when that teacher was found, why should he question or doubt more ?

He did not make his purpose known to Alice until the eve of his reception into the Church, and then it was done in a very few words. "Wife—please God to-morrow 'll see me a Catholic," he remarked.

"I thought you was one already," replied Mrs. Greenway, "or I don't know why you keep going to that place where they tell me there are all manner of doings, such as never was known in Hammersley. I can't understand what has come over you, James ! you, a steady middle-aged man, that ought to know better than take up with such new-fangled ways."

"They're no *new* ways, Alice," he answered. "They're the ways of Christ Himself, before all the doubts and disbelief crept into men's hearts. Some day I'm thinking everyone will go back to the old Faith, by reason of finding there's nothing to depend on in any other."

She murmured some indistinct reply, and left the kitchen. Never in all their lives had there been such a cloud as now hovered over the cottage, seeming as if it obscured all the content which had once been there !

Esther, however, had taken in her uncle's meaning, and she crept close to him, laying her little hand in his.

"I'll be one too, Uncle James," she said. "I'd like to be a Catholic."

"Bless you, my darling !" he exclaimed. "Please God you shall, then, soon ; and you and I can pray for Aunt Alice, who just now, poor soul, can't see the right of things."

Little did Mrs. Greenway know that hers should be the tongue to kindle the flame which rose against the carpenter ; in the irritation of the moment, she confided to Mrs. Jenkins the fact that he had said that the morrow would see him a Catholic, and the news spread with a rapidity which is never equalled by anything *but* news.

Thus it was, that when Greenway went to the workshop upon the day succeeding this great event in his life, a change in the manner of his comrades caught his attention

directly. One answered his "Good-day, Sam" by turning away, the other two laughed and stared, feeling gratified to see by his heightened colour that he was not indifferent to their conduct though he made no remark, and took his usual place in silence.

"There's folks as'll find religion don't pay," was the first word uttered by one Benjamin Adams.

"I never had a liking for those that went after new ways," said another, with a glance at Greenway's corner.

Silence still, except for a second titter; until Hodges the master, who was there, looked up, saying briefly:

"Get on with your work, Adams, if you can."

At six o'clock, when the business of the day was ended, James laid aside his tools, and walked up to his employer.

"I've served you these good many years faithfully and well," he began; "but it seems to-day as if there's a change come into the workshop, so it isn't like the same place."

Hodges looked at him steadily.

“Yes, you’ve been a good workman, I’m not likely to gainsay you there,” he answered slowly. “For all that, the time’s come when you don’t suit me. It was a bad day that ever brought these Farleys down in these parts with their Catholic doings, and ’twas a worse day when you began to go along with them. I know what they are, and if I had to shut up shop, I’d do it rather than have a Catholic in my place; so if your mind’s made up, there’s nothing for it but for us to part.”

“My mind is made up,” said James firmly. “If it’s to give up the old place, or give up the religion I’ve learnt to see is the right one, my choice isn’t hard to make. Would you rather me leave now, or at the week’s end, master?”

“At the week’s end,” said Hodges briefly; “and I’d never have believed you could be such a fool.”

Greenway gathered up his tools in silence, then with a “Good-evening to you,” put on his cap and went out past the three other workmen who stood just beyond the threshold laughing and jesting; but bravely as he bore it, he felt this to be an undeserved and heavy blow.

Not only were there the associations clinging around the old place which could not painlessly be torn away, but the sense of humiliation in the eyes of the Hammersley people was keenly realized as he walked homewards; they had always predicted that Hodges would soon give up the business to his foreman, and now an hour or more would suffice to set every man and woman in the village gossiping over the change which had taken place and the cause of it also.

So hard seemed the immediate present, that it was not until his hand was on the latch of the gate that it came into his mind to consider this matter as it related to the future; to see that he would almost certainly have to leave the village of his birth for some distant unfamiliar place which could never be as dear even if it was more busy and prosperous. He was not able to think it all out then, for already his wife had discerned his coming, and already little Esther was running out to greet him; but perhaps never had the cottage seemed so dear as now, when he felt it would soon be occupied by others.

He was uniformly a quiet man, and Alice

did not notice his unusual silence any more than she could divine how difficult he found it to be cheerful with the child and answer all her questions as usual. Little did she imagine either that almost the worst of his suffering was caused by the knowledge that she must share it.

So vividly did he realize what village gossip could be when mingled with a certain amount of animosity, that it was just as if he could see the eyes of neighbours fixed upon him, or hear the taunting voices of boys and girls saying, "There goes James Greenway, as Hodges sent away for turning Catholic."

Did he even for a moment wish that he had lingered awhile before making open profession of his new Faith? Ah, how should *I* tell you? for only He Who knows and reads the secrets of all hearts can know the various ways in which temptation comes; if such a thought was his in this first breaking of the cloud, it was only a passing feeling, and his purpose remained unfaltering.

The real struggle was to forgive the injustice of his dismissal, to resist the first impulse to enter into open competition with his

old master, and injure him as a foreman could do who had been the mainstay of a business. When little Esther was borne off to bed, James Greenway bent down his head upon his folded hands, and went through the fierceness of the combat which we all experience at times in our lives, between the promptings of nature and the teaching of grace.

"Alice, can you sit quiet a bit, and hear something I want to tell you?" he asked, as his wife re-entered the kitchen.

"Why yes, surely," she answered, a little surprised at his grave manner, yet wholly unprepared for anything in the form of trouble to be imparted.

There was a pause; it was quite long enough for telling everything, but James felt difficulty in beginning.

"Wife," he said at last, and it came hesitatingly—"what should you say if we were to leave Hammersley? you, and me, and little Esther? There are many places where there 'd be more work going."

Had a thunderbolt fallen, or had she experienced a shock of earthquake, I scarcely think that poor Mrs. Greenway's agitation and

distress could have been greater than they were at this moment when her husband thus questioned her ; she seemed absolutely unable to speak, and only gazed at him with open eyes and face paling from its usually healthy colour.

“ Leave Hammersley ! ” she cried at last ; “ James ! you’re never in earnest—you, a sober man, and no young lad that can’t settle easy anywhere for love of all that’s new ! Leave the place you’ve lived in man and boy all your life, and where you’re respected for miles and miles round—why, ’twould be nothing short of madness ! ”

“ All the same such a thing is like to be,” he answered sadly. “ See here, Alice. Supposing it was a question of doing right—suppose I felt that God couldn’t have made it plainer that I must leave the old place ; you wouldn’t be afraid then that I was doing a foolish thing ? ”

Even now she could not perceive how thoroughly in earnest he was.

“ Oh, if you’re only *supposing*, that’s child’s play,” she answered, growing cheerful on the instant. “ It’s like our little Esther—*she’d* go

on supposing as long as any one 'd listen to her."

"Ah! it's no child's play now," he said quickly; and then, with some trouble, he made her understand exactly what had befallen him.

To describe the slow process by which Mrs. Greenway grasped the truth, to depict her indignation, her sorrow, her innumerable forecastings of misery, would be impossible; it is enough to say that if it had been hard to Greenway to look his future in the face alone, it became trebly hard when he saw his wife's distress, and felt himself so powerless to console her.

"Well, one thing's certain," she remarked, "it'll be my death. I couldn't hold up my head here, with all the neighbours throwing at me as you'd turned Catholic; but to leave the place I've lived in ever since I married you is——"

Her utterance failed, and poor Alice burst into a flood of the bitterest weeping.

"Come, come!" said Greenway, rising up and laying a hand on her shoulder. "It falls hard on both of us, and perhaps worse for you,

seeing how women cling to their bits of furniture, and can't bear change. If I knew how to help all this, I'd have done it gladly, Alice ; but seeing as I'm not sent away for any wrong-doing, it's only right to believe that God'll turn it all to blessing by-and-by."

"I don't want to cast things at you," sobbed Mrs. Greenway, "seeing it's never been my way. All the same, and not to deceive you, James, I can't say it isn't your fault. Why need you go and turn Papist, when there's the parish church handy, and the Vicar as good a gentleman as needs be, though a trifle old and—as folks say—past seeing after anything?"

"Why need I?" he answered. "It may seem to you I needn't have done it, but—— Well, s'pose I saw as if I went one road I'd come to my death, and if I took another I'd go on my journey safe and sure, you'd say I was foolish, and wicked too, if I hesitated what to do."

"I'm not talking of journeys ; I'm talking of your being taken up with Papists, and I feel as if my life was scarce safe any longer," said Alice, crying afresh. "You might turn agin me—who knows?"

"Nay, nay, wife—that's foolish talking," he answered gently. "I'll be a better husband now than ever I was—you'll see."

"It's like you men to be fond of change," exclaimed Mrs. Greenway, her thoughts taking another direction. "I suppose it's London you're hankering after now." But then she felt the injustice of the accusation, and added, "Don't mind what I say, James. What with the shock of it, and the thought of the neighbours gossiping, and the fear of leaving Hammersley, I scarce know what I'm talking about."

"Get you to rest, do," he said gravely; "you're tired. Maybe to-morrow we shall see everything clearer;" but when he had his will, and was left alone, he remained in his seat pondering over that coming morrow with any but hopeful anticipations.

Up rose the sun on that eventful Tuesday morning, and shone as brightly as if no such things as sorrow and change were known on earth; but for both James and Alice Greenway the cheerful aspect of their little cottage-home increased the pain with which they thought of leaving it.

“There’s a picture in that same old Bible you used to be for ever showing to the child,” said the wife, turning from her newly-lighted fire to fix a pair of tear-stained eyes upon her husband’s face, “as has been in my mind the best part of the night. It’s somewhat as you and I shall feel when we leave Hammersley, I’m thinking—that picture of Adam and Eve going down from Eden into the darksome world. As if there was nothing sure and certain before us, and all the happiness left behind!”

“Not quite so bad as that,” said Greenway, trying to speak cheerfully. “We will hope there’s happiness to come, go where we may, with God over all, and little Esther to brighten us up when we’re like to be down-hearted.”

“Ah, speaking of Esther, it’s time to go and rouse her,” said Alice. “*She’ll* feel leaving the place, poor dear!”

The man sighed heavily, and began to wonder how he could explain everything to this little creature, who had so wound herself round his heart that he could not bear to give her even a momentary unhappiness. He would

not have let her hear what was to come, if it had not been for the fear of the gossip of the village first reaching her.

"Esther, my lassie," he began, when they were at breakfast, "you've seen many places in your little life, but I'm thinking you like Hammersley as well as any of them."

"Better than everyone, uncle," she answered eagerly.

The husband and wife exchanged glances, and probably the disclosure of the gloomy news might after all have been postponed had not the child turned her grave eyes upon the face of her aunt, noting its strange disturbance.

"Are you sorry for anything?" she said; but that was the last drop of bitterness to poor Mrs. Greenway, who burst into tears and made a hurried escape, much to little Esther's alarm.

"My lassie, come here," said James, motioning her to get down from her chair and take her favourite place on his knee; "you are always a good little girl, but you must be better than ever to-day, and kind to your poor aunt. She's very sad, my dear—sadder than she has been in all her life before, I'm think-

ing—because we shall have to go away from Hammersley, where we've lived so long, and been so happy."

There was a pause, broken by the very natural inquiry on Esther's part, "Why?"

"You know I've turned a Catholic because I see it's the true religion," said Greenway.

The child nodded in assent.

"And it's set everyone against me, especially the man I've worked under so long. So he don't want me at the carpenter's shop after this week, Esther; and as it would go against my conscience to stop here to do him any harm, and begin all manner of envy and ill-will perhaps in both of us, I mean to pack up and start off elsewhere. With health and the knowledge of a good trade, there's no cause for fear."

"Why must you go because you're a Catholic?" said Esther, very greatly puzzled now.

"Ah, my dear, that's more than I can say," responded Greenway with a shake of his head. "It wouldn't make any difference in the way I planed a board, or drove a nail, one'd say; but all the same I've been told I'm not wanted."

“Well, never mind,” said Esther calmly; “I’ll be a Catholic too, and we will all go and be happy somewhere else.”

Ah! how children may comfort us in the sorrows they so imperfectly understand! how often we are taught by their trustfulness! how often some innocent word wings its way to our inmost heart and lodges a truth there!

In this case it seemed to James Greenway that he had been looking solely on the worst side of his present trouble, that he had not dwelt upon the idea that they would still be altogether, and that happiness was possible even apart from Hammersley and the associations of a lifetime.

“God bless you, my little Esther!” he said, setting her down gently, and rising from his chair. “And now supposing you run off to Aunt Alice, for it’s time I was at the workshop.”



CHAPTER VI.

A SURPRISE.

THE place which James Greenway had chosen for a second home was but a small town; nevertheless after Hammersley, and in the eyes of such a simple woman as Alice, it assumed quite an important appearance as she saw it for the first time on the evening of her arrival.

As a beginning, the carpenter had secured three rooms in a good-sized house, which, being furnished with the old cottage properties, bore some resemblance to home; but the outlook from the windows was upon a narrow street, every sound from which filled the heart of Mrs. Greenway with apprehension. She had borne up bravely through the separation from the old place, and now she put a good face upon her difficulties and regrets, and grew busy in

the "getting to-rights" which filled up the first week; but to the ears of little Esther she would confide her conviction that "no good" might be hoped to result from the step which her husband had taken.

The untidy habits of her immediate neighbours were a positive source of grief to her, and she lifted up eyes and hands as well as voice, when she discerned cabbage-leaves and potato-parings thrown out into the street, or an old battered bonnet or worn shoe by way of variety among the refuse. Then when Esther lured her out of doors, she trembled at every passing cart, and shuddered at the mere sight of the waves which the child loved to sit near and watch in all their changes. "The very sound of them seems to tell me over again the stories I've heard of shipwreck and drowning," she would say. "I don't call them 'beautiful' Esther; I call them dreadful! Many's the poor man that's gone down underneath for ever, leaving his wife and children to grieve for him. How those fishermen's wives can bear their lives is more than I understand."

On nights when the wind rose high, poor

Mrs. Greenway imagined its wailings among the chimney-pots were the cries of those at sea, or that she heard the sound of distress-signals fired from some foundering vessel. These were the drawbacks of the new life, but otherwise all promised well; and the carpenter was prospering as he had never done in the old Hammersley days, where his wife was happy among the cottage flowers—the cabbage-roses, sweet-williams, stocks, and London-pride, which seemed to her better than anything rarer or lovelier.

“We’ll get a little place of our own, and that will make you happier,” said James, as he found things were likely to prosper; but even when the “little place” was found, his poor wife seemed sadly changed from her own brisk, cheerful self of former times.

Esther [was troubled to see her aunt’s despondency, but they were less together now, for Greenway had decided that the child should be sent daily to the Catholic school, near by their new home; yet when she came in, her pretty chatter would take some at least of the cloud of despondency from the brow of poor “Aunt Alice,” as she sung her simple

little songs or told some of the events of her day.

Thus time passed; spring turned to summer, and autumn winds and rains set in, to be followed by winter's frost. It was soon a year since they had left the Kentish village, and to little Esther and her uncle it had not been an unhappy twelve-months.

To poor Mrs. Greenway, however, each week had seemed as two, for dreariness and heaviness; and when her cheerful content left her, health appeared failing also, and both her husband and the child watched her anxiously. It had become almost impossible to get her out of doors even on Sundays. "No, no, I've not the heart for it," was always her answer; and at last they left her alone to ponder over her own woes and sorrows, which seemed to have taken full possession of her mind.

It troubled the carpenter to see her like this, for he had built so much upon her becoming happier as time passed; and moreover he had hoped that she too might see things as he did, and become one with him in the faith he held. But Alice Greenway's horror of Catholicism had not died out on leaving the bigoted little

village she loved ; and when Esther was baptized she had said many a bitter word, although she could not deny that the child was her husband's own relative, and that he had a perfect right to train her as he desired, especially as the little creature was impatient to be in all respects "like Uncle James."

This had happened as soon as they were settled in the new home, when Mrs. Greenway's feelings were warm and fresh ; perhaps, however, the gloom into which she sank afterwards, the coldness which crept in between the three, was more hopeless. It was a new thing, then, when James and his niece came up the road one Sunday after Mass to see her watching for them, looking almost her own self, and speaking eagerly even before they had come to the gate.

"There's no saying what may happen, surely," she began. "Little did I think that ever I should hear a word from Hammersley again ; yet here is Mrs. Jenkins a-sitting in the kitchen as natural as can be, and brings news that would astonish anyone."

"Mrs. Jenkins that lived next to us in the old place ?" said Greenway, as surprised as his wife could have expected him to be.

Esther, meanwhile, had run in to greet an old friend, whom she remembered as always so very kind to her.

"Yes—and what do you think? Hodges is laid by with illness, and calling out as never was for you to come back and manage the business for him. Mrs. Jenkins thought she'd let us know, and, being wishful to see her sister, who lives not five miles away, she came on here this morning. You'll go back to the old place, James, won't you?"

"I must hear all about it, and think what is best and right," he answered. "But I'm glad you've got your old neighbour to see you, Alice; you look like you used once more."

"I thought I'd run out and get a word with you first," continued Mrs. Greenway, ignoring the allusion to her sudden cheerfulness. "There's many changes come over the old place, she says."

The carpenter was not at all unwilling to hear tidings of Hammersley and its people; he had a kindly feeling, too, towards Mrs. Jenkins, remembering that she alone, of all their former friends, had protested stoutly her opinion that a man had a right to be of what

religion he pleased, and to predict the certainty of Hodges finding out his mistake in discharging a good servant for a cause with which he had rightly no concern. His greeting, therefore, was scarcely one whit less warm than that which Alice had accorded her friend ; and Mrs. Jenkins afterwards declared that she " couldn't complain of her welcome," for the best the cottage could provide was set before her.

A few births, marriages, and deaths she had to tell of, and these were delightful items of intelligence for Mrs. Greenway ; but the chief thing in her mind to relate was the number of people who had " turned," as she phrased it, becoming the constant frequenters of the little chapel at Uplands, to the scandal of the Vicar and the church-going party.

" I've felt that way inclined myself, off and on," she added candidly ; " only the thought came that what did for those that was before me, ought by rights to do for me too. As for the children—well, they're just crazy to go to the Catholic school that's been opened ; and I don't see why they shouldn't, except that their father seems not to like it, for fear as it may

go against them with the gentry. Yet there's one or two good families as are Catholic too, and it seems as if one never knew who wouldn't be the next heard of."

If Hammersley could be thus transformed, Mrs. Greenway's prejudices became less on the instant. A broad charity she had never known before seemed to take hold of her, and cause her to affirm that religion made no difference so long as folks did what was right.

"That is good hearing from you, Alice," said her husband quaintly, "seeing you used to feel that Catholics were so bad. Only I hope the day will come when you'll go a step further, and see that it's religion which *does* make folks do right, and therefore we must know what it is, and hold fast to it."

"There's a deal in what you say—a deal," exclaimed good-natured Mrs. Jenkins, who always was disposed to agree with the last speaker. "But it's about Hodges I've come to see you, and I may as well tell you all about it, just as my husband heard it."

"First of all, tell us *how* he heard it," said Greenway, "for I know there's some in Hammersley it isn't safe to speak after."

"You're right there," rejoined Mrs. Jenkins. "As I was saying only last night to my sister Mary Jane, there's nothing to come up to a village for knowing everyone's business, better than they know it themselves, I says—but I was going to tell you about Hodges. I'd advise you to think of coming back to the old place, James Greenway."

It was trying to the man's patience, however, by a tedious process of questioning and cross-questioning, the facts were gained. It seemed that Hodges had openly announced his wish to see his old foreman back, "Catholic or no Catholic;" for he himself had fallen into ill-health, and a succession of incompetent and untrustworthy helpers had wearied his patience, and conclusively proved to him that, in the words of Mrs. Jenkins he had "not known when he was well off."

"I've always seen as when a man does a mean trick, it comes home to him," continued the voluble woman. "I remember when I was a girl, there was something like it happened, which, though it's years ago, I call to mind as clear and plain as yesterday. Let me think—it must have been—nine and five are fourteen,

and two are sixteen—yes, it must have been sixteen years, neither more nor less——” But in the middle of her reminiscences, Mrs. Jenkins discovered that time was flying fast, and that the light cart which had conveyed her to visit her old friends would be now waiting at a certain pre-arranged spot, to take her back to her sister’s ; so with a hurried farewell, and an entreaty to Greenway to think seriously over the news she had imported, she bade them good-bye.

Little Esther was the first to speak.

“Uncle James, shall we go back to Hammersley?” she said.

It was seldom that James Greenway was deaf to a question from this petted child ; but this time she repeated it, and only then received an absent “I can’t tell, lassie—I can’t tell.”

“I’m going out for a bit,” he added, almost directly. “No—I’ll go by myself, little Esther ; I can think best alone over all this.”

Esther drew back, repulsed, and the tears shone in her eyes as she turned away. When her uncle had really gone out without her,

she threw herself into her aunt's arms, and cried bitterly.

"Never mind, dearie," said Alice kindly. "He's only a bit taken by surprise with all this; you've no cause to fret. As for me, it's as if I had come back to myself, with just the hope of seeing the old place. I wonder if the cottage is let to anyone who'd give it up to us, Esther? I couldn't fancy any other as well, and there's not many to choose from in Hammersley."

"I think uncle has gone to pray about it," said Esther, a sudden light breaking in upon her perplexity. "He's gone to the little church to ask God to show him what is right to do!"

"Dear, dear!" and Mrs. Greenway started up nervously, and going to the door, looked out in the hope of seeing her husband within recall; she felt as if some happiness or blessing was about to be prayed away from her. "You don't really think it's to the Catholic church James has gone, Esther?"

"Yes, I do," said the child confidently, "because I know he's done it before about other things. It is always best to ask God

when we don't know what is right, Aunt Alice."

"I've nothing to say against what's right," remarked Mrs. Greenway, still looking anxious; "but it's plain enough, as I see it, that James ought to get back to the place where he was doing well and respected—there's no need to go to church to learn *that*. And as for praying in a church where there's no singing nor preaching, nor service going on—well, he might as well have stopped at home and talked things over quiet and reasonable."

"Oh, aunt, you don't understand," said Esther earnestly. "*Our* church isn't like others, where there's nothing but emptiness as soon as the service is over and the clergyman gone! God is there *always*, Aunt Alice, though we can't see Him."

"They say as God is everywhere—at least I've heard tell so when I was your age," responded Mrs. Greenway. "There was no call for James to take himself off to the Catholic church. He says his prayers at home night and morning, and if it's more prayers he is after

now, he needn't have gone out of the house to make them."

Esther sighed. On many another occasion she had felt her inability to express what she knew and had learned, to one like her Aunt Alice; at the present time she thought it as well to change the subject of conversation.

"How different it must be at Hammersley now," she said softly. "If so many people are getting to be Catholics they will soon want a church built; the little chapel at Uplands won't be big enough."

"It never used to be what one might call a religious place," remarked Mrs. Greenway thoughtfully, "and it seems to me that we all did very well without so much talk of church and the like. However, whatever Hammersley may be now, I'll be glad enough to get back to it. I hope James won't come in again with his mind made up to stay here; yet I have my doubts, seeing it's to church he has gone to think it over."

She turned away to see after some household duty, and Esther went to the door to watch for her uncle. It was not far to the little church wherein she felt sure she should find him. A

strong desire came into her mind to go and wait quite near him until he was ready to come home. Quick as thought, she caught up her hat.

"I'll go and fetch uncle," she cried to her aunt, and then ran swiftly down the road, and pushing open the unlocked door, looked round the church. At first it seemed to her that there was no one there, but after a minute or two she discerned the figure she sought kneeling in a quiet corner not far from the altar. The child placed herself on one of the benches to wait; and though that waiting seemed long, she felt neither weariness nor impatience, for her interest in watching her uncle's face was so very keen.

"I don't think he knows what to do yet," she reflected, as the carpenter's head went down upon his bowed hands. "I suppose he feels it hard not to please Aunt Alice, and hard to go back to Hammersley to work for the man who turned him off. Oh, how I do wonder what he will do!"

She was partly right in her fancies: there was a great contest going on within the breast of the man whose outward bearing seemed so

calm and tranquil. From the days when he had pondered over the old Bible for the benefit of his little niece, he had become very familiar with many a passage of Scripture ; and one of these had found its way into his mind at the moment that he turned from his cottage to seek enlightenment and help in the presence of Him Who is ever with us in the Blessed Sacrament. "If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God Who giveth to all men abundantly and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." Truly James Greenway felt his need just now of prayer ; and however long it might have been, I think he would have knelt on until some ray from heaven seemed cast upon his path, until something seemed to tell him, "This is the way." Yet it was not really many minutes after Esther had discovered him that he looked up with the cloud gone from his brow, the uncertainty from his mind. "The servant is not greater than his Lord," he had read that morning ; and not being of those who interpret God's words to accord with their own inclinations, who will take them literally or figuratively as may be most suitable to their own ends, Greenway saw

nothing before him but choosing that which would cost his proud nature something. That which had in it most of humiliation—was not this the choice of Christ for Himself? And must not it therefore be the choice of those who would most perfectly please and serve Him?

“I will go back to Hammersley, for only pride would keep me here longer,” was the man’s decision; and when, as he rose up and walked to the door, little Esther came to his side and looked up with a silent inquiry in her eyes, he pressed her small hand in his own and said simply, “It seems plain to me now, lassie, that God calls us back to the old place.”

“It will make Aunt Alice so happy,” was Esther’s cry, as they went down the road together. “You won’t mind, Uncle James?”

“No—I shan’t mind,” he answered, with a peculiar smile on his face; but he was in no mood for talking even to his little companion and confidante, so he bade her run forward with the news.

Mrs. Greenway’s demeanour that evening was one of extreme cheerfulness; she laid schemes for the commencement of packing

early on Monday morning, though her husband assured her it would be a full month before he was ready to leave all his work ; probably her faith in prayer was greater since it had brought about the decision she most desired !



CHAPTER VII.

A DARK DAY.

BEFORE removing his family, James Greenway took the journey to Hammersley for the purpose of seeing his former master, and inquiring into the truth of Mrs. Jenkins's statements that he was wanted in the old place. His wife awaited his return with almost a child's anxiety; and "Is it all settled?" was her inquiry, even before little Esther found time to greet her uncle.

"Yes, it's settled, all fair and square and comfortable," answered the carpenter with a half-smile. "Dear! and the old master is altered—I should scarcely have taken him for the same man. For one thing, he's so broken down and weakly; for another, he's so quieted and mild-like, and saying that never did anyone serve him as I did."

"And the old cottage?" exclaimed Alice.

"Ah, you can't get back *there*," he answered. "I'd have managed it for you if it'd been possible, but there's some new folk there who don't feel disposed for a change."

"New folk!" repeated Mrs. Greenway. "And how came such in Hammersley? There never used to be any round about who weren't known to everyone in the village."

"Times are changed," said James, "and suddenly changed as one may say, considering it's such a short time after all since we came away. I chanced to meet Mr. and Mrs. Farley near the old cottage, Alice, and never could anyone have spoken up more kindly about my returning to Hammersley. 'It will be a good day for all of us,' says the lady to me; 'and you'll find many Catholics that were little better than heathens when you were here.'"

"Did you see any place we could have?" said Alice, turning to subjects which interested her more than the religion of the village.

"Yes—I've engaged to have the little cottage old Margaret Drake used to live in; close by the church, you remember. Poor soul,

she died but a fortnight back, so it was standing empty."

"It's a damp part," said Mrs. Greenway, already resolved that no house should be so good as the lost house, "and I don't myself much fancy going in where there's been a death; however, if there was nothing better it can't be helped, and one must make the best of it. When are you to begin work for Hodges?"

"Next Tuesday morning, and this is Wednesday," said James. "You'll be rare and busy I'm thinking, Alice."

She was indeed! Even her husband looked on amazed at her re-found energy, and was rather glad to get out of the way of it at moments when his assistance was in nowise required.

Their last night at the seaport town was wild and stormy, but the morning was fresh and fair; the sun quivered on the waving branches of the trees, the rain had washed the tender green leaves, and the spring breeze was rustling and shaking them in the warm light.

"Hammersley will look so pretty, uncle,"

said Esther, gazing into his face, as if thus she might read his thoughts.

"Yes, yes, lassie," he answered; and at once lapsed into silent pondering over that return which was not altogether a subject of happiness to him.

To Alice, however, it was something of a triumphal entry, when, as they neared the first of the familiar cottages which were dotted here and there—after the straggling fashion peculiar to some villages—an old friend ran out to give them greeting and to chat a minute or two while the light cart, which contained the little party, stood still. On for a few yards, and then another stoppage; for the news had spread beforehand that the Greenways were coming, and even those who had troubled little concerning their departure, now welcomed them, as savouring somewhat of novelty and likely to make Hammersley life a trifle more interesting by the account they could give of their experiences of a distant town, during a twelve-month's absence.

"Well, it's something to find as everyone has a kindly feeling and is glad to see us back. It's plain now, James, that I was in the right

when I blamed you for going away" said Mrs. Greenway, when she had taken possession of the little place which was now to become "home."

He did not argue with her—to argue with Alice was much such an unsatisfactory business as pursuing a shadow; besides, he was in no mind for it.

"I think I'll take a look round before night comes," he said; and no objection being made, Esther went with him, and their steps were turned to Uplands and Mrs. Farley's little chapel. "Happen there might be Benediction," said James simply; "but anyway, lassie, Our Lord's there, and there's a many things I'd like to put before Him."

"Yes, uncle," answered Esther; nor did she speak again until, just as they reached Uplands, her ear caught the sound of music, and she cried, "There's something going on—they're singing one of the hymns I learned at the school."

The service had just begun, and the first words which they heard on entering the little building were those of one of Esther's "favourites," as she called them:

“Mary, Mother, shield us through life,
Protect us from the ocean’s strife ;
Calm the wild sea, bid tempests cease—
Through thee we reach the shore in peace.”

It was sung to the end ; the recitation of the Rosary came next, and then followed Benediction. But all through there floated in James Greenway’s ears the melody of the little hymn ; and turning it into a prayer, he asked Mary, the Mother of mankind, to be his shield, his protection in this fresh beginning of life in the old familiar places.

“Alice,” he said gently that night, “I wish we could say a prayer together, you and me, for the first time in our new home. We’ve much to be thankful for, as I’m sure you won’t deny, seeing it’s God’s doing that we are back in the place you like best of all the world.”

“Yes, I’ll own I’m thankful to find myself in Hammersley again,” returned Mrs. Greenway ; “but when it comes to a question of prayers, not even to please you, James, will I go and pray to graven images, which is a plain turning against the commandments.”

Often and often had he already tried to clear his wife’s mind of this mistaken notion, that the *image* a Catholic may place before

him to assist his mind and stimulate his devotion is not addressed in prayer, is not the subject of adoration : it was useless to begin upon this again just now, so James Greenway only sighed a little wearily, and held to his request that she would offer one prayer to God with him.

“ Come, Alice, let us kneel down here where there’s not even a crucifix hung up yet ;” and he glanced round the tiny kitchen, which, on that first evening, was—even under such management as Mrs. Greenway’s—not a little disordered. “ There’s one prayer common to all of us—you’ve heard it in the parish church whenever you’ve been there. Let’s say the *Our Father* before we go to rest, asking God to let a blessing come on us here.”

Mrs. Greenway would have said it was a waste of the precious moments which would otherwise have been devoted to her process of “ settling,” but she was in a complacent mood which led her to humour her husband in his desire ; still, as she knelt by the kitchen table her eyes wandered to the dresser, and she became so absorbed in calculations as to its capabilities in the matter of accommodating

plates and dishes, that she only roused herself in time to supplement her husband's petitions with a hasty "for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory," which she deemed a species of testifying to Protestant principles incumbent upon all right-minded persons.

It had been a small concession in a sense, but an unsatisfactory one — nevertheless it lightened the carpenter's heart. He took it for an earnest of better things, those "good things" he had been asking for poor Alice, ever since his own eyes had been opened to understand God's truth a little, ever since he had himself tasted somewhat of the peace of a good conscience, the happiness of a hope centred in things more lasting than earthly favour and temporal success.

If by coming back to Hammersley—to Hammersley in its present state, where truth seemed making progress, and day dawning on the old darkness of heart—Alice was to find God, little indeed did he care that in such a return there was much sacrifice, much laying down of feeling purely human. He believed that so it might be. Though one of the plainest, most homely-thinking working men, he in-

dulged that night in something very nearly approaching one of little Esther's day-dreams, in which he saw his wife a changed creature, her good points made better and clearer by true religious feeling, her little peculiarities of character and temper all melting under the influence of faith, hope, and charity.

I do not suppose he looked forward to a cloudless existence; perhaps, indeed, he only took short views and pleasant ones of life that evening. But it seemed to him clear that it was well to be there in the old spot, that if in quitting it he had done right and wisely, God had made clearly visible that it was the moment to return; and thus even the anticipation of a few gibes and sneers from the comrades he would meet in the workshop on the morrow would not be very hard to endure. He was a hale strong man, still in life's prime, not likely to be easily assailed by thoughts and fears of death; nevertheless his mind seemed to flow, after a very peaceful fashion, to the time when work and waiting, prayer and struggle, would be over: and so his little niece's hymn, which had been sung at Uplands that evening, came back to him, and "Through thee we reach the

shore in peace" was almost his last waking thought.

Esther had gone happily to bed long before the lights were out in the little cottage. She had been contented in the seaport town, because, with those she loved, hers was a nature which could content itself anywhere: still her thoughts had always turned secretly to Hammersley, with a longing which even her uncle James could never have guessed; and if her joy in returning there had been quiet and almost grave, it was none the less intense. Her little head was full of delightful schemes for "Aunt Alice;" how she was to be won to the Uplands chapel, to receive the visits of the priest, to confide in him and listen to his teaching, and so at last become in deed and truth a Catholic. Bright was the picture on which her eyes closed—dark, pitifully dark, was that on which they opened in the grey dawn of the spring morning, when one of the women who had been summoned, in the moment of Mrs. Greenway's alarm, carried the child to her uncle, with the startling news that he was dying.

Dying!—he so strong, so well but yesterday!

It could not be, said all the village when the news went round ; nevertheless, so it was. Some seizure of the heart, from no discoverable cause, had roused him in the dead of night ; and not even his wife's tears, nor the aid of doctors and of kindly neighbours, could avail anything but to keep him with them through a few lingering hours, during which he might utter his last words and wishes, and make ready for the unseen world into which he so suddenly and so soon must pass.

"Alice, my dear wife," he said faintly, "I'm glad we said that prayer together—you and me. 'Twas the first, and I'd thought it wouldn't be the last by a good many ; but God knows best, and His holy will be done."

There was a pause, only broken by the poor woman's sobs and the crying of little Esther ; for the neighbours had gone outside to leave these three together.

'I'm glad I'd brought you back to the old spot, Alice," he went on. "'Twill go hard with you even here, but 'twould have been harder away in a place where you felt yourself a stranger. I'd like to have lived a bit longer, to leave you provided for as I'd wish, and to

see little Esther grow a woman; but God hasn't seen fit to spare me. I'd like more 'n all to have lived to see you a good Catholic, Alice; but perhaps—who knows?—my death will do it, and my life wouldn't."

A faint smile passed over the chill lips, as if in that borderland just one ray of light was thrown upon God's purpose—the purpose which in heaven will be radiantly clear to all of us; as if he could just discern that granted prayers and much-desired blessings were wrapped within this dark drear cloud which closed around them.

"Nay, nay, don't grieve too much, Alice," he said, laying a hand upon her bowed head, and the other upon the head of the child. "You'll be lonesome, I know, and life must be hard and bitter to you, for we've been happy and content together; but here is the child left—'cur blessing,' as I've often called her. Esther," and here he turned his eyes on the little creature, who was cowering on the bed beside him in an agony of fear and grief almost exceeding that which she had felt when her mother died—"Esther dear, I've thanked God many a time that He gave you

to me, but I thank Him more now as I lie here dying. I know you'll be good and loving to your poor aunt—no one could wish to have a better child than you've been to us from the first day I brought you home from London. You must help her, Esther, my dear—help her when she's most cast down, by thinking of the place where we may meet again; and talk to her of the way to get there, Esther dear, which you've been taught so well, and say every day to her, 'Uncle James begged you with his last breath to be a Catholic.' And pray for her, darling; and pray for me, and get a Mass or two said for me. And keep close to God, my little lassie, and don't let anything nor anybody tempt you from Him as you grow older. Ah! there's much I'd like to say, but—I—oh! I can't——"

Here the sharp agony came again, and the priest, who was recalled to the room; and though a short respite followed, it was only the end, the parting of soul from body, with no more farewell than a glance, a pressure of the hand. So all was over; the stalwart carpenter of Hammersley lay dead in the glorious brightness of the morning—that

morning which was to have seen him once more busy with plane and hammer in the workshop where he had spent his youth. The brave way in which people view the sorrows of others would be almost amusing, were it not so sad to see: the calm offers of sympathy and promise of prayer, when a little honest practical help is within their power—and is certainly what God would bid them yield their fellow-creatures—is amusing too, if again it were not so pitiable because it is so unchristian. Even in poor Mrs. Greenway's case, she found herself more hurt than eased by the species of consolation which flowed in.

“Shut the door upon 'em — every one, Mrs. Jenkins,” she said to this one friend, whose presence was tolerated “*I don't want their talk of Providence and the like. I want to sit down quiet, and think how I'm to get my bread; and I don't look for any of 'em to show me the way. Leave me alone with my poor dead man and little Esther!*”

“I won't let ne'er a one of 'em come nigh you,” said Mrs. Jenkins, who had wept for sympathy through the night, until her eyes

were almost useless and her tears were absolutely exhausted; "but you mustn't begin fretting about your bread when your husband's been a hard-working man and able to lay by some of his savings."

"They was laid by against we were old, and I'm not going to live on 'em now," responded Mrs. Greenway. "But — dear, dear! — how can I think of anything but that I've lost the best husband as ever stepped!" And here she began to cry afresh, with little Esther's arms twined round her in silent sympathy. "There's something unlucky about the place," she began again, after a brief pause. "Do you mind me saying I didn't fancy this cottage by reason of Margaret Drake dying here? One death brings another, some folks think; and it's been so now, with your poor uncle taken off so sudden. Ah, Esther, Esther! what are you and me going to do without him?"

The poor child's brain was turning over and over the same question. Her life had for so long been connected with her much-loved "Uncle James," that to do without him seemed impossible. Neverthe-

less, she thought more of comforting her aunt than of her own distress, and so stayed patiently by her side during her alternate weeping and lamenting; keeping silence when silence seemed preferred, and speaking a few little faltering words when words seemed required of her. Only once she managed to say something which was not well received, relative to "everyone being sorry."

"Sorry!" cried Mrs. Greenway, who regarded the wordy sympathy of her neighbours as a drug in the market—an article the supply of which was altogether in excess of the demand. "Much good will it do us, Esther child, when there's ne'er a one of them but Mrs. Jenkins would be ready to do us a kind turn which cost ever so little. *I* know the world as you can't, being a child; and I don't need no one to tell me that there's nothing much less worth having than people's 'sorrow' when a misfortune knocks one down."

This hard judgment of her fellows was something so new and strange—nay, the expression on the once comely cheerful face was so different, that Esther looked up almost

timidly ; then Mrs. Greenway softened and began to weep afresh.

“I’m getting fairly worn out and cross-grained, I fear,” she sobbed. “Don’t mind half I say, dear ; for I shall come to think better of it by-and-by.”

“Would you like the priest to come and see you, Aunt Alice ?” asked the child. “He promised to call in and ask how you were this evening.”

“No, no ; I don’t want neither priest nor parson,” answered poor Alice, rocking herself to and fro in her dreary anguish of mind. “They can’t give me back my poor husband ; nor you the uncle who’s loved you like his very own ! Ah, and to think I was so glad to get to Hammersley, and never had a feeling that there was a trouble like this to meet me.”

Nevertheless, when the priest did come—“for manners’ sake,” as she expressed it—Alice Greenway consented to receive him ; and finding that he made no attack upon her irreligion, but limited himself to a few kind true words about her husband’s worth, she was beguiled into a conversation, during which she gave an exhaustive review of her whole

career, in the listening to which Father Morton's patience might indeed have been counted heroic.

After that first day the poor wife wept no more, but crept about her little cottage pale and heavy-eyed, yet softly, as if some one was sleeping and must not be awakened. Mechanically she tidied the rooms and performed her necessary household duties; but when these were done she would sit down by the coffin which contained her husband's form, feeling that while she possessed *that* he had not wholly left her. Her love of talking had given place to a deep moody silence, scarcely broken by a word even to little Esther. Nor did the child guess that all this time Mrs. Greenway's mind was busy with those almost last words which had escaped James, as he lay dying, in speaking of his wish for her: "Say every day, Uncle James begged you with his last breath to be a Catholic."



CHAPTER VIII.

FIRST STEPS.

COULD the sunshine have been brighter could the little Kentish village have looked more fair and smiling than on the day when Greenway, the carpenter, was buried? All the air was fragrant with the sweetness of lilac and hawthorn, and musical with the blowing of the soft winds and the singing of thrushes and blackbirds. The chestnut-trees were fully leaved and covered with their spiky cream-hued blooms, the two tall poplars by the cottage-gate rustled pleasantly, and over all was the clear blue sky, with glimpses of fleecy white clouds sailing across it here and there.

Alice sat within like one in a dream, after the coffin had been carried out. Father Morton had seen her for a moment, but she

greeted him abstractedly; she did not even appear to heed little Esther's sobs as the strange footsteps passed along the passage to the door, and the slight confusion subsided into the terrible hush and stillness which told that all was done and over, except the brief and simple ceremony at the grave.

It was suddenly, at last, that she spoke—so suddenly that the child by her side started and trembled.

"There'd be no harm done in saying a prayer," remarked the poor woman, who knew no comfort in addressing God, yet believed it a customary proceeding in times of trouble, and almost as much a part of a funeral as the undertaker's appearance. "You used to go to the church with your poor uncle, Esther, so you must know the sort of prayers he liked best."

"Yes," replied the little thing, and without a pause she began the "Our Father."

"Aye, that was it he asked me to say with him the last evening; and what with the journey here and the unsettledness of the place, I could scarce give a thought to it. But I didn't say poor James nay," she added,

with a passing gleam of satisfaction. "I'm glad to think of it now he's gone. Let us have some more, Esther."

Willingly the child repeated the various prayers to which she was most accustomed—the "Ave Maria," "Salve Regina," and the "Memorare;" whether her aunt either understood or appreciated them she had no means of guessing, unless it might be by the loud-toned "Amen" which Mrs. Greenway uttered at each pause, impelled probably by recollections of the old clerk of the parish church.

Her constant friend, Mrs. Jenkins, had been dismissed for once, as well as all others who proffered their company. "I'd rather you let me be," was her answer to everyone; and thus, for the whole of that sad day, she sat within her desolate house, tolerating only the company of her niece Esther.

But towards evening poor, changeful Alice wearied a little of this self-chosen isolation, even to the point of complaining of the desertion of every one. It was fortunate that Mrs. Farley's knock occurred at such an opportune moment, for she could not with any consistency resist the child's eager "Oh, do

see the kind lady from Uplands, Aunt Alice!" although her manner did not betray much satisfaction.

"Indeed, ma'am, I'm fairly beat down with trouble," she responded to the visitor's first greeting. "Never did a woman have a better husband than mine, for all he had turned Catholic; and to see him took so sudden—and him so well and strong to look at—falls hard on me!"

"It does indeed," said Mrs. Farley gently. "Ever since I heard the news I have felt greatly troubled about you and this poor little girl. But it must be a comfort to you to remember what a good pious man your husband was; it would be far more terrible if you had to sit now and grieve over him being struck down in the midst of a bad life, as it sometimes happens."

"Well, I don't know about that," remarked Alice. "It's come into my mind now and again as there's some wives that can't have much to grieve for, by reason of the husband being best out of the way. It wasn't so with my James; and we'd been as comfortable together as need be these many years, which

makes it the worse to bear now. If you'll believe me, ma'am," and she looked at Mrs. Farley for the first time with a direct gaze, "there's days when I can almost fancy I hear his step on the floor, or his voice calling for me, and I start up thinking to do something for him—but there's nothing he'll want from me more."

"Oh, do not say that!" exclaimed Mrs. Farley. "There are your prayers—he wants them, he needs them! I don't think there is anything which helps us to bear the death of our friends so much as the certainty that by praying we can do good to their souls. They are not wholly gone from us while we can aid them."

"Prayers!" repeated Alice. "I'm not much in the way of prayers, having always had my hands too full of work; but if ever anyone asked th' Almighty anything earnest, 'twas me during those hours my James lay dying. I asked for him to live as well as I knew how, but 'twas no manner of use, as you see, ma'am; and all the praying in the world won't bring back them that's dead and buried."

"No indeed," rejoined Mrs. Farley. "God knows best, and when it is His will to take away one of His creatures, no words of ours can prevent nor bring them back. Still, the soul of your husband lives, Mrs. Greenway; it has not yet passed to its full rest, and for this you and all of us who knew him can pray."

"Pray for a dead and gone man—as I've seen a corpse with my own eyes!" said Alice; and then, with a dreary shake of the head, she added, "if that's what Catholics do, it's no manner of use, I can tell 'em."

"Catholics pray for the living soul—the soul which cannot die," said Mrs. Farley steadily. "Surely you know that when your husband passed away from this world, that was not an end of all for him? Surely you have heard of heaven and of hell?"

"Yes, I've heard of 'em," said Alice hesitatingly. "If heaven's for the good, my James is there a'ready."

"Heaven is for the good, for those who have struggled hard in life to love and serve God, and avoid all which is displeasing to Him. But even the very best of people fail

in many ways; they sin, they fall, and thus, though they repent, they are not quite pure and stainless when they die—as pure as God must have the souls which dwell with Him forever in heaven.”

“I’ll never believe my James has gone to the bad place—no, not if a hundred ladies sat in my kitchen and told me so!” cried Alice, with an angry gleam in her tearful eyes. “*James!*—as never had a word said agen him save for turning Catholic, as even his own wife never see the worse for drink, as brought home his wages reg’lar as the weeks come round, and left a matter of twenty pounds, five shillings and sevenpence laid by in the savings’-bank against wanting it!”

“I believe there are few men as good and as much respected as your husband was, Mrs. Greenway,” continued Mrs. Farley, laying a gentle hand on her arm. “I shall say far more in his praise than you have done, for I feel sure he was a truly Christian man—a man who loved God and had learned to serve Him rightly, because he listened to Christ’s Church as a teacher. I only wish to comfort you when I say that there is much for you to

do for him, and every prayer you offer will make you feel as if you were less parted one from the other. I feel sure, thank God, that the soul of Greenway is *safe*—that he has escaped the eternal punishment of sin because he has so fully repented, because Christ's own blood has been poured out upon him again and again in the Sacrament of our Church. All this you cannot exactly understand—you will some time, I hope; but can you not believe me that every little prayer you offer is a way of helping his soul to *greater* peace, greater happiness—even into the constant presence of God?"

"I don't see how it can; but if I could make him happier, wherever he is, I'd be glad to try. He'll know maybe I'm trying;" and she looked almost wistfully at her visitor.

"Oh, I am sure it will make you happier," said Mrs. Farley warmly. "In your sorrow and loneliness, you will find it a comfort to say, 'He is not too far for my prayers to reach him;' and as you repeat an 'Our Father,' or any of the simple words little Esther can show you in one of her books, you will grow more peaceful—you will indeed. And then,

Mrs. Greenway, as your husband went that last evening of his life to our little chapel, would you like to come there now and then when all is quiet and no one is about? You could say a prayer there and think of him."

"Well, I'd thought of that a'ready," said Alice. It'd come into my mind—well, I shouldn't like it to be said I was turning Catholic of a sudden, but for all that, I'd be glad if I could go into the chapel where he set foot the last time he passed the door, little thinking what was coming on him."

"It is very quiet there this evening," said Mrs. Farley. "It is a fine night, and there will be the moon to light you home. Shall I walk there with you now, after this long, sad day indoors?"

Mrs. Greenway hesitated, but at length agreed, for despite all her resolutions to sit in solitary, dreary silence, she found it very ill-suited to her natural character; and there was not only something agreeable in having a listener and sympathizer, but the still more soothing fact that this should be no mere neighbourly woman of her own class, but the popular lady who owned Uplands.

"I suppose no one would take it amiss seeing me out, when he was only buried this morning," she said. "However, a breath of air is good for the child, and she'll not leave me; so I'll go, ma'am, and thank you."

Thus, then, was Mrs. Greenway's first visit to the Catholic chapel brought about; just as she reached its door she caught little Esther's hand and whispered, "It's only the '*Our Father*' I know—I suppose if I say that, it will do;" then, encouraged by the child's gesture, she entered and knelt down as she saw her companions doing.

Who of us can tell the varied influences which have been produced upon the human heart by a brief stay in the presence of Christ, in many such a humble little building as the chapel at Uplands? Who of us can know how conscience has been roused, how memories have been awakened, how sorrows have been well-nigh healed, how peace, and hope, and courage have been imparted, even by the *silence* of our Blessed Lord upon the altar; and yet there are, and there ever will be, moments when we are ready to cry, "Oh, if He would but *speak* to us, if He would but grant one word as a sign of His divine will in our perplexity!"

Upon poor untaught Alice Greenway, the calm silence with which she was surrounded had an effect which rather startled Esther, who could not tell that the burst of bitter weeping gave some ease to an over-burdened heart. Nor could she tell either that to her aunt it seemed as if that death-room scene was being acted over again ; that once more she could almost imagine those dimming eyes were turned upon her with a mute request—that desire which was afterwards uttered to little Esther. So strangely keen also was the woman's sense of there being some difference in that one to the ordinary churches she had entered at rare intervals of her life, that she presently began to look round her curiously, wiping her eyes now and then ; then came back to her words which her husband had let fall, and the little girl's simple assurance that God was there, *actually there* upon the altar of every Catholic church, and it did not seem so altogether impossible to believe. And suddenly the purpose of her visit came into her mind, and slowly and half-aloud she went through the only prayer with which she was at all familiar, and as she uttered the words, she

really believed what Mrs. Farley had told her, and was not only glad to feel that even for the dead petitions to God were availing, but also that she must learn more prayers to use, either by questioning her little niece or by studying the clearly-printed book which had belonged to the carpenter.

Presently Mrs. Farley went to her, and probably whispered that she would do well to go home, for she rose at once, and again closely imitating her companions, even to the reverent genuflection, passed out.

"I shall come and see you to-morrow," said her new friend, with a kind pressure of the hand, and so Alice and the little girl walked along the lane together, towards their cottage.

"Esther—do you think as your poor dead uncle knows where I've been to-night?" were the first words spoken between them.

"I'm not *sure*, Aunt Alice," replied the child, with a little hesitation, "but I like to think so; it makes me not quite so unhappy."

"That was why I went," continued Mrs. Greenway. "Something seemed to tell me as I might have pleased him while he was here by going to his church with him, and so maybe

he'd know now I was ready to make up for it. Yes, that was what took me, Esther—nothing more nor less. But when I was kneeling there, 'twas as if every word he ever said to me about his Catholic religion came back as clear as if he were speaking it; I seemed to see him kneeling before that Cross he'd hung up on the wall, and the little image he'd stood on the table under it, which many and many a time—God forgive me!—I've felt angry enough to break. And as I thought first of one thing and then of another, the only wish in my heart was that he was here now to listen to me telling him that his way should be my way, and I'd learn to be a Catholic too."

"Oh, Aunt Alice, you can do that, even though Uncle James is dead!—think how he said I was to remind you it was his last wish."

"Yes; but I don't know what I've got to do, and new ways don't fit easy at my time of life," said Mrs. Greenway. "Besides, Esther, there's something else to think of—there's no more wages to come in from the carpentering, and I don't want to take out of my poor man's savings, except for his burying, and what can't be done without. I'm scarce young enough,

to go to service again—besides, I couldn't part from you, my dear ; still, some way or another, there's a living to be made for the two of us, and there'll be no time to be thinking of religion."

"Uncle James always found time to think of it," remarked Esther, "and *he* worked hard every day."

This was undeniable, as the sigh that escaped from Mrs. Greenway seemed to confess. "Ah well, we can't see what's before us all at once," she said. "And here we are at home, though it'll never seem like home to me without my good husband ;" and then all the loneliness of her position came back upon her, and she wept and lamented long after even her patient little companion had sobbed herself to sleep.

Yet when Alice felt herself unwatched, when Esther's regular breathing assured her that she might do what she would unobserved, she knelt down before the Crucifix on the wall, just as she had seen her dead husband do, night and morning, with a vague idea that by this action she would be not only imitating him, but benefiting herself. No cry broke from her lips then ; she only remained dumbly regarding

that imaged figure with fixed dilated eyes. Wherever James might be now, whatsoever gulf yawned between them, though she had lost the light of her own life, some consciousness was in her heart that *it was not for ever*—there was hope of a future to sustain her. Never in all her days until this time of sorrow had she cast about within her to discover if she had any one settled belief; but Mrs. Farley's words had roused the positive conviction that this life is not the end of things for us, that future happiness or misery must await all who have been called to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. For James, his bereaved wife had no fear; she knew his simple piety. For herself there was now alarm, a real alarm—she could partly understand his concern that she had felt neither love nor fear of God.

To see him again, was that not something to strive for? And if hitherto Mrs. Greenway had, in common with many another irreligious person, spoken of heaven and the meeting there much as if the subject had been emigration to New Zealand performed in detachments by an affectionate family, she realized now that it could not be a matter of

chance, of ease, of certainty. A confusion was in her mind as she kept her gaze upon the little plaster crucifix. It represented, as she knew, the death and the life-giving sacrifice of Christ the Saviour of the world ; but in what manner this was to benefit herself she could not have told anyone, neither could she have explained why to pray before it had been the carpenter's daily custom.

"I don't know anything," she murmured at last. "I want some one to teach me ; that's what I want. If my poor James begged me, as he lay dying, to be a Catholic, a Catholic I'm bound to be, seeing I want to do what I left undone when he was here, and am sorry for now ; but how or where to begin, I know no more than a baby !"

The little, however, which she did understand, the first hesitating step upon the new way which lay outspread in uncertainty before her, she tried to make the most of ; it was only the "Our Father," which she knew as a prayer her husband had used and loved, and she was repeating it when she lay down beside the sleeping child, and her own heavy eyes closed at last.

When morning came—the sweet, fresh spring morning—Mrs. Greenway rose up with the will to carry her great sorrow quietly.

“Esther,” she said to the child, “you must begin to go to the little school for Catholic children, for I know ’twas the first thing your uncle would have thought of. Dear, how pleased he was that day Mrs. Jenkins came over to see us, and told us all the Hammersley news! ‘There’s even a school the priest has begun,’ says she; and I mind how, after she was gone, and James and me were talking things over, and I was doing my best to persuade him to go back, he says: ‘There’d be a school for Esther, and that’s one reason for it. I shouldn’t like to take her to a place where she must be taught a many useful things but not a word about Almighty God according to what Catholics believe in Him.’ Those were his very words, Esther; so you mustn’t be stopping at home with me any more.”

‘You’ll take me the first morning, won’t you, aunt?’ said Esther, with a little natural shyness. ‘I should think we must go to the priest about it.’

Mrs. Greenway looked doubtful ; but at last consented, as no other means of arranging for the child's schooling suggested itself to her mind.

"I scarce like to be walking here and there, and him so lately buried," she said sorrowfully ; "however, what's right must be done, I suppose. I'll go with you to speak to this Father Morton, then ; maybe he could put a thought into my head about work for myself."

"I wish I was big, and then I should do work enough for both of us," said Esther, stealing her hand within her aunt's.

"Ah, my dear, wishes are poor sorts of things at best," replied Alice. "It'll be many a year before you can work for yourself ; and when you're old enough, you'll find it none too easy. I'm sure my head is pretty well dazed with one thing and another ; so I can't for the life of me think what I'm good for. I am a fairish hand at sewing ; but where's the sewing that'll come out of Hammersley enough to keep body and soul together, 'twould puzzle Solomon himself to tell."

It was a dispiriting view of life, and un-

fortunately true enough to carry weight with it. Esther prepared for her appearance at the school in a sorrowful mood, and wished again, as she had done so often in that past sad week, that she was a woman instead of a little girl.

Some comfort came to her, however, from the conviction that God would not be wanting in granting them the help He has promised to those who seek it; and she ventured to say something of this as they walked towards Uplands. But Mrs. Greenway received the suggestion less good-naturedly than was her custom when Esther was the speaker.

“For goodness’ sake, child!” she exclaimed rather sharply, “don’t begin repeating just what you’ve heard Mrs. Jenkins and the rest say. It’s fine to talk, when it’s of other people’s troubles, about God helping. I’ve heard most of it from them that’s afraid of being asked to lend a hand themselves! They’re ready enough to shift things on to th’ Almighty; but there I am, getting cross over it, though I’d made up my mind that never a rough word should pass my lips to rise up against me, as many a word does that I spoke to my poor James!”

They were just at Uplands now, and the sight of the priest's little cottage, with the small school-house adjoining it, put Mrs. Greenway in what she termed "a fluster." However, it would not have been like her to turn coward, so with an effort, she brought her mind to the ringing of the bell, and thus was quickly ushered into the priest's presence.

Her special errand was soon explained and Esther was taken to her new schoolmates—not as yet very many in number, for children, and especially children who sought admission among Catholics, were not plentiful in Hammersley.

"I'd like to say a word to you myself, sir," said Mrs. Greenway to Father Morton, as they came out of the schoolroom; and being taken back to the little parlour, it seemed after all an easy thing to tell so kind a listener her fears for the future as regarded temporal things, and from this she found herself led on to reveal much of her condition of mind on religious matters.

"A Catholic I'm bound to be," she repeated more than once; "but I don't know how." After such an assertion she could not

refuse the offer of instruction which was held out to her, and when she took her leave it was with a little penny Catechism in her hand, which she had promised to look at carefully, and the undertaking given that she would appear at an hour Father Morton had appointed for talking to her of the concerns of her soul.

“Little Esther can read it to me,” she had said, when the Catechism was put before her, and so it was that the same evening the child was called to begin her task.



CHAPTER IX.

A SHADOW.

DESPITE the fair promise of her first beginning, never did priest have greater disappointment in his efforts to do good to a soul than had Father Morton in the case of Alice Greenway.

She had no objection to any special doctrine of the Church—she singled out no one thing which she felt hard or impossible to believe; she even went so far as assenting to all she was told; but when it was a question of *action* she held determinedly back.

The concern and desire which her husband's sudden death had excited seemed lulled to sleep by the fact that she went to the Catholic chapel, and stood and sat and knelt by turns, after the fashion of those around her; also because she set Esther to read from the

Catechism as regularly as evening came round, and occasionally visited the priest and listened respectfully to all he urged on her. With so much done, Mrs. Greenway felt aggrieved that more was expected of her. She was wont to say that if she was not a Catholic, she was so much *like* one that people would hardly know the difference, and to herself this seemed most satisfactory.

Her mind was soon set at ease, as regarded her own maintenance and that of the child, by the fact that she was given the post of lodge-keeper at one of the large gentleman's houses outside the village; and as this had been offered by the influence of the Vicar of Hammersley, she had some scruple as to whether she was not bound to an appearance in the old church as a proof of gratitude.

From this step she was, however, deterred—first, because no one asked it of her; secondly, because she felt it necessary to keep Esther company at the little Catholic chapel; thirdly, because she felt a dim consciousness that she had committed herself to something almost like a promise by the coffin of her dead hus-

band that she would follow the religion he had chosen for himself.

She could not—*would* not see that the half-following of it was little worth. As weeks and months passed on, she became more entirely satisfied with her way of life, and was alike a stranger to concern either for present or future. The one point on which she was perhaps truly Catholic was that of prayers for the dead. She would even argue in favour of it, after her own odd fashion, with her friend, Mrs. Jenkins.

“Yes, it’s right against the Church of England—you needn’t tell me that,” she would say. “But that don’t matter, not one bit. There’s heaven and there’s hell—the Vicar himself would tell you that much—and it stands to sense that though there couldn’t be a much better man than my James, being took sudden and unawares-like, he mightn’t have been rightly fit for heaven; so it’s fair to believe there’s some place between earth and heaven, and that is what Catholics call purgatory—leastways, as I understand their meaning.”

“Well, I’m no scholar,” Mrs. Jenkins would

answer humbly; "but it's plain to me as you're three parts a Catholic." And her friend would answer:

"Yes, you'd scarce know the difference, would you?" and repeat the conversation at length to Esther as a method of self-justification.

Like many another person of better knowledge, the idea of confession was unpalatable. It was very well for those who *liked* it; but to Mrs. Greenway it seemed a matter on which she might reserve to herself the right of private judgment.

"Bless you, ma'am," she would answer Mrs. Farley, who tried hard to impress her with the real need of the Sacraments, "I shouldn't know what to say, and I'm sure I wouldn't be wishful to trouble the good gentleman for nothing. I tried to do my duty when my husband was here, and I've tried to do it since; and, thank God, there's no one in all Hammersley can cast up anything against me as I'm ashamed of."

So time went by, days and weeks followed in uneventful routine, and Esther's little face was growing into a girl's face, her legs and

skirts lengthening together, her thoughtful childishness developing into something almost womanly, as she began now seriously to think of what her work in life should be. She could not follow the example of her aunt Alice; and, closing her eyes to the future, slide on like some quiet river towards the unknown sea! No ideas filled her mind of being somewhat above her station; she had none of the foolish feeling which deems domestic service almost a degradation, and certainly a drudgery; and her ambition was to be old enough to get occupied in the family of Mrs. Farley or other of the Catholics round about Hammersley.

To leave the village would scarcely be possible, for this would be to leave Mrs. Greenway, whom the child had looked on almost in the light of some sacred charge, put upon her by her dear and unforgotten uncle; some one to pray for, to influence (in so far as a woman can be influenced by one so young as Esther), to remind of the wish and hope of him who was gone. Otherwise, there might have been a little of the desire which is sure to spring up within the young sooner or later, to see

fresh scenes and livelier ones than a quiet country village affords, wherein each day is a counterpart of yesterday, and nothing very novel is to be expected on the morrow.

Sometimes Esther would talk over her future with her aunt, especially when she was nearing fourteen years old and her school-days were just over; but Mrs. Greenway did not very much fancy the schemes which the child made for herself.

‘There’s no call for you to go to service while we’re living rent-free, and have been settled comfortably for all these years, and no chance of being turned out. Never could anything have happened more fortunately than the Vicar getting me here as lodge-keeper and to help up at the house now and again; it’s been the way of having a good home over our heads, Esther, and I see no use in your leaving it. You might do a little with dressmaking or millinery, being handy at your needle. I’ve nothing to say against that.’

“I’d *rather* try service,” Esther would answer. “Not to go away from Hammersley, but somewhere quite close, where I was able to see you very often, aunt.”

“Meaning at *Uplands*, I suppose,” said Mrs. Greenway, with a little spice of vexation in look and tone. “From the first day we came back here—and you and my poor husband went off to that chapel before there was a thing in its place for any of us—to *this* day, there’s nowhere your mind has been so fixed on as that house! I’m not saying but Mrs. Farley’s a kind-hearted lady,” she added hastily, “but there’s others as good, even if they’re not Catholics.”

“I am sure everyone has been kind,” said Esther gently; “but I would rather be a servant with Catholics if I can.”

“I don’t see that it matters at all,” responded Mrs. Greenway, “but I suppose you think you know best; it’s the common way at your age.”

This decision that nothing *mattered* had become a constant one for several years; it had lain at the root of a withdrawal from Catholic influence, at the root of the giving up attendance at Mass, which for a considerable time after her husband’s death had been Alice’s Sunday rule.

When her sorrow was fresh, and conscience

had been to some extent awakened, she seemed so near to the acceptance of grace; soon she had turned away from it as a needless gift, or one which might be of more value as time went on.

Mrs. Greenway's had, however, always been a changeful nature, and in due course she consented not only to Esther's going to service, but to Uplands, a situation there being open to her. It was certainly dreary at the Lodge when the bright girl had left it, but Mrs. Farley allowed a meeting whenever Alice chose to come up to her house, besides kindly making opportunities for Esther to run "home" once or twice during the interval between Sunday and Sunday.

Thus pleasantly did the future open before the girl; if there were little difficulties and disappointments inseparable from the first beginning of a new way of life, she met them with a good will and a brave spirit, which as we all know is the way to level the roughest road, or to brighten a grey sky. Esther's was not a rough road, nor was her domestic life a sunless one. "They are so kind to me," was her constant report to her aunt; and after a

time she would add, "I really think I am getting on." Unlike many girls, and some, indeed, who have reached woman's estate, she had not considered *only* the comfort or advantage to herself as a servant at Uplands, but also the point of whether she could prove useful. This was partly attributable to words which had frequently fallen from her aunt at the lodge.

"It turns me fairly sick," Mrs. Greenway would say, in a fit of indignation against modern domestics, "to hear women that have to get their living talking as if they needn't do a hand's turn. 'It's not a place as'd suit me,' says one; and it never crosses her mind as to whether *she'd suit the place*. 'There's too much to do,' says another. Or, 'I couldn't stand it, not getting out as I've been used to.' All I know is, I'd blush for you, Esther, if you were to talk after that fashion."

So if Esther had no religious training from her aunt, it is but fair to admit that she was not sent out into life without a good stock of the common-sense workaday notions which Alice Greenway had herself imbibed in her early youth; and Mrs. Farley reaped the

advantage of finding in the young girl a cheerful willingness to learn and to work, as a counterpoise to ignorance of much which time and habit would combine to teach her—in all this she was in exact contrast to another young girl from the village, who occupied much such a place under the cook which Esther had under the housemaid.

Frances Carter was not a native of Hammersley; she belonged to one of the families who had settled there comparatively lately, and upon whom people like Mrs. Greenway looked with a mixture of doubt and disapproval.

Though her home was rather an indifferent one, the girl had a good character in the little Catholic school, and it was by the priest's earnest request that an opening was made for her in the Uplands kitchen—the training of young women under her own competent servants being one of Mrs. Farley's many ways of doing good.

“I'm sorry you'll have that Frances Carter for company,” Alice Greenway had said when her niece first told her of the new addition to her employer's household; but this regret was based upon the fact that Frances was not “of

Hammersley," but had come there with her father and mother with nothing more certainly known about them than that they were "London bred," and thus inferior in good qualities to all Kentish people.

"*She'll* be no account with the work," said Alice, when Esther spoke of Frances as very good-natured; and afterwards she invariably declined to hear any more concerning the girl on the occasions of her niece's visits, or those times when she herself went up to Mrs. Farley's for a few moments' chat.

Smoothly then rolled the first months of Esther's service; as it grew near the end of a year, she had become quite a clever little housemaid, and popular both in drawing-room and in kitchen.

Bright though her face might be, merry her laugh, and light her heart, there was within Esther's nature a capability of which no one guessed from a mere ordinary knowledge of her; she was not able, even had she wished it, to speak freely of herself—to tell how, even in this time of early girlhood, the sweetness of sacrifice, the joy of giving up all for others and for God, seemed to open

before her soul's gaze in times of prayer, or after she had received her Lord in Holy Communion.

Once or twice a little of this had crept out in a few trembling words to Father Morton.

"I cannot see what God has in store for you, my child," he answered. "I have thought that He would in some way bind you to the Cross; but it is not for me to predict what lies hidden from our eyes. Do your present duty—the duties which lie nearest—and rest content. It is very certain that if we *are* truly called to walk with Jesus in suffering, it is a blessed way, and a way of safety."

On, then, went the days, and the threads of the lives of the two young maids in the household at Uplands were more and more woven together; little did either of them dream of a cloud gathering while they went through the routine of work, and talked and laughed, ate and slept, in company.

Gradually, however, Esther got to know that her friend Frances was unhappy, that her temper grew uncertain, her moods changeful; until at length the misery of her heart

crept into the expression of her face, and caused both her mistress and the servants to ask what ailed her. She had no complaint to make, even to Esther; but she moaned in her restless sleep; and in sleep at last her secret came out, and passed to the other girl's knowledge.

It was a burden for all one long and slow-passing week; then, in hesitating tones, Esther let Frances understand what had happened, and how her concealed dishonesty was betrayed.

At first Frances was angry, indignant, positive in her assertions that there was no ground for her disjointed confession—that people “often talked nonsense in their sleep;” after a while, however, she changed her course of action, and melting into tears, appealed to Esther's tenderness of heart.

“If you knew what my home is,” she urged, “if you only knew how my father needed just what I took for him, you would not wonder, Esther. And Mr. and Mrs. Farley have plenty; they will never even miss those three poor sovereigns—never know they are gone, I believe. It is not as if I did them an injury.”

"But it is stealing, all the same," returned Esther, "and even if they never find out that the money is gone, the sin is the same. Oh, Frances! if you had only *asked* Mrs. Farley, I am sure she would have helped you."

"Are you?" said Frances, with an angry sob; "then that proves how little you know about her, as far as *I* am concerned. You are a favourite, but as for me—well, I only know what a lecture I got the last time I asked for my wages before they came due."

"Only because you were getting extravagant, and too fond of dress," said Esther gently. "Oh Frances, don't be angry! but it would be quite a different thing to ask help in any trouble you have at home."

"Don't preach at me," returned the other sharply—but then, remembering all that was at stake, she softened once more, and with tears implored Esther to keep her secret unrevealed.

"I am so afraid of doing what is not right and best—but yet I suppose it *could* not be right for me to make known what has been wrong in you," said Esther thoughtfully. "If I am asked anything, what shall I say?"

"*You* will never be asked," was the answer. "Oh, Esther! I could not have believed you would be so selfish—you are afraid of getting the least bit of blame to save me from losing my good name and everything else."

"Indeed I was not thinking of myself," said Esther, her eyes filling. "It is for your own sake I want you to tell Mrs. Farley all—not for mine. You will be so unhappy, Frances, even if she never finds out how you have acted."

"I shall have to confess it," said Frances sullenly. "That is the worst of being a Catholic, and of living with people who are for ever bothering about our going to the Sacraments. But what are you looking pleased at now?"

"Oh, because you don't mean to hide the sin from God, and of course if His priest knows it you will learn what you must do. I am not afraid any more, Frances; you may be sure that I will never tell what I know."

"Not even if you were suspected?" said Frances quickly. "I am sure you will not be—indeed, I would tell of myself first; I am only asking just to hear what you will say, Esther."

"I should not be very unhappy if I were suspected of what I had never done," said the other girl quietly. "It would be easy, because God would be thinking so differently to what others were thinking of us."

The bell summoning Esther upstairs put an end to the conversation, and it was only when they were both preparing to go to rest in the room they shared together that the subject was resumed by her timid inquiry—

"You will soon be going to the church to see Father Morton, won't you, Frances?"

"Yes; I'll go on Saturday," said the other. "Why do you ask me such a thing?"

"Why?—oh, because you will not be happy until you have told him all," answered Esther simply; and as Frances responded by declaring herself sleepy and disinclined to talk, she knelt down before her little Crucifix, and prayed longer than was her custom.

When she rose up, Frances, looking cautiously from under her half-closed eye-lids, thought that she had never seen on any face a look such as that which was on the face of her young fellow-servant—it puzzled her. Grave even to sadness, yet very peaceful, it was

almost the expression of one who, catching a glimpse of coming suffering, has found courage and strength at the foot of the Cross; yet Esther had not foreseen the shadow over her sky—it was only as if, looking up through its blue clearness, some whisper had reached her to tell that in shame and humiliation there may be concealed a joy such as the heart of the happy and well-esteemed can never conceive!

When Saturday came Frances Carter asked leave to go out, and Esther believed she was bound on an errand which should set her feet in a right path; she would have been pained and startled had she been able to watch her friend speeding towards her home, a mile and more away, laughing within herself to think how cleverly she had managed.



CHAPTER X.

UNDER SUSPICION.

IT was a sultry June day, even in the country; the sun must have been merciless where it fell on the streets of close, unshaded town-houses. The mistress of Uplands had taken her work to an open window, but it fell from her hands; less, however, by reason of weariness than because of the perplexed thoughts which were harassing her.

“Sitting dreaming!” exclaimed Mr. Farley, walking in from the garden. “That is not much in your line, my dear.” But the smile faded from his lips as he came in full view of his wife’s face, and he added, “What is the matter?”

“I hardly know, except that something is troubling me which seems very inexplicable,”

she answered. "In all the years of our married life, we have had good, faithful servants. Do you think it is possible that there is one untrustworthy person now?"

"Certainly not," was the reply. "The women are thorough good Catholics, and as for the girls—why, my dear wife, how has any suspicion entered into your mind?"

"Do not call it suspicion yet," she answered, "when I am trying my hardest not to suspect any *thing* nor any *one*. I have been trying for an hour or more to find a solution to this enigma—how some money has gone from the little drawer in my writing-table. It is the second time; the first time I believed I had myself spent something and forgotten it, but now that the same discovery is forced on me—Ah! money cannot vanish without hands, and I have always trusted the servants so fully, as you know, that I have left every place unlocked. Perhaps I have been wrong in this—it may have put temptation in the way of such young girls as Frances and Esther."

"Frances is always in the kitchen, isn't she?" said Mr. Farley; "and Esther, why, I

would vouch for the girl's honesty as I would for my own!"

"Yes; I should say the same. But in the face of an absolute fact what can we think? and the money has certainly gone."

"You must look again," replied Mr. Farley; "for I would not on any account harbour an unjust suspicion."

"I could not bring myself to accuse either Esther or Frances;" and Mrs. Farley looked thoughtfully out over the garden, as if she might perchance find an answer to her difficulty among the shrubs and blossoms. There she saw the special object of her thoughts—even Esther, who had taken to the duty of gathering flowers daily to ornament the rooms, and evinced a very pretty taste in her decorations.

"She has not the least look of one who could do a mean or dishonest thing," was the lady's reflection; "besides, she comes of such thoroughly respectable people. As for Frances—well, she has not nearly so many opportunities of coming in here; she rarely leaves the kitchen, while Esther is in and out all day,

and knows almost as well as myself where I keep everything."

However, neither thinking nor searching had the effect of throwing light on the mystery; the money was gone, and the point which Mrs. Farley could scarcely decide was whether or no to speak of the matter to her household. In the end she decided that to do so was right, however unpleasant; for otherwise the offender might be encouraged to believe that a theft would be unnoticed and thus could easily be repeated another time.

Very gently did their mistress inquire of both girls if they could say anything about the matter. Frances heard her with an air of incredulous surprise, which passed excellently well for innocence; Esther, on the contrary, coloured and trembled, and could only falter, "I did not take it."

There was no further scene: neither Mr. nor Mrs. Farley were people who would be harsh in any case, much less a case of mere suspicion; but the impression left on both their minds was that Esther had yielded to some sudden temptation, and they urged her to speak out fearlessly, for that she should certainly be forgiven.

"I cannot tell anything about it," she sobbed ; and when Father Morton was made aware of the occurrence and spoke to her similarly, her answer was just the same.

"You *knew* the money was gone then?" they would say to her ; and she was obliged to admit this knowledge, but yet protested her innocence of the theft.

"I never felt so uncomfortable before," Mrs. Farley remarked to her husband, when all efforts to move Esther to disclose more had failed. "Her look, her admission that she knew the drawer where I so foolishly left a sum of loose gold, her further admission that she knew the money was gone, all seem against her ; and yet she says she is innocent, and from my knowledge of her I am bound to believe her word. Frances is quite different ; it is as plain to Father Morton as to ourselves that she had no idea of the contents of my writing-table, and was surprised that any money was missing. I shall take care not to injure Esther's character in Hammersley, but I must send for her aunt, and tell her how things are."

The friendly dusk sheltered Mrs. Green-

way's face when she came up to that interview with Mrs. Farley — came without anything forewarning her of a trouble or a shame ; when she had heard all, tears of honest indignation shone in her eyes, but she did not credit a word against Esther.

“If the girl says she is innocent, ma'am, innocent she *is*,” was all she answered when the facts were laid before her. “She may be a silly child, and thinking it right to screen the real thief ; but that is the most against her, I'm certain.”

“I hope so, indeed ; we have all thought so very highly of your niece,” said Mrs. Farley. “You must understand, Mrs. Greenway, that I do not bring any accusation against her. I have only mentioned the matter to Father Morton, and I sent for you, feeling it a duty. I shall keep both the girls in my service until I see grave reason for dismissing either of them ; but for the future I shall be watchful.”

Alice Greenway's face had assumed an expression which the lady did not quite understand—it was not one of thankfulness for her forbearance, but of some strong independent resolution.

"Begging your pardon, ma'am," she said quietly, "but *Esther* will not stop in service at Uplands. I was only waiting to say that I'd take her home with me this evening, for I'd never let her stay where she wasn't trusted. She's young, ma'am, and I dare say has got her giddy trying ways, like most other girls, but there's no harm in *Esther*. Since she came home to me and my poor husband years back now, she's been a real blessing and comfort: and I know I'm only acting as he would act if he were here, when I say I'll take her back with me this evening, if you please."

"I cannot refuse, of course, if that is your decision," said Mrs. Farley, "but it seems a pity, for her own sake. You know how things are spoken of in a small village, and it is almost certain that the Hammersley people will discover *some* fault lies at the bottom of such a sudden departure. The girl has her character at stake, and it might be difficult for her to obtain another situation, except away in some distant place—which you would object to."

"Ma'am," said Alice firmly, but still respectfully, "I have no mind to let *Esther* try after

fresh places ; she shall stop with me as long as I've a roof over my head, for she's dear to me as my own child. Perhaps the time may come when all this will be cleared up, but that's as it may be. Would you please let me tell Esther to put her few things together, for I must be getting home ?”

“I will send for her here,” was Mrs. Farley's reply. “I wish to speak to her and let her know that I had no desire for her to leave me so suddenly ;” and rising, she rang the bell and gave the order.

If Esther was pale when she entered the drawing-room, she did not look either timid or guilty. There was an expression of patience on her face which touched Mrs. Farley deeply, and which moved her to speak warmly and kindly as to her previous satisfaction with the girl's conduct.

“Although you are under a little cloud, and I cannot pretend to have the same firm trust in you,” she added, “I hoped that it would pass, that you would clear yourself, and so I am sorry your aunt will not leave you at Uplands. What is your own feeling, Esther ? Do you wish to go ?”

"No, ma'am; for I have been very happy here until this," said the girl; "I thought just at first I couldn't stay to be suspected, but afterwards I didn't feel it would be too hard to bear. I don't want to go away with you, Aunt Alice."

"It's not what you want, but what *I* want," and Mrs. Greenway seemed losing a little of that strong self-control by which she had concealed her irritation hitherto. "You'll go home with me this evening, and not a penny of wages goes with you, Esther; my mind's made up, girl, so don't try to gainsay me."

"Put up your things then," said Mrs. Farley. "It is your duty to obey your aunt. I can only say, Esther, that I am truly grieved about all this, and I shall constantly pray that the mystery may be cleared away, and we may be sure you are the honest, good Catholic girl we have believed you. Your wages you must take, however; it is not just that you should forfeit the result of nearly a whole quarter's work."

"Leave the money there, Esther," said Mrs. Greenway, as the sum was counted out and laid on the table. "Ma'am, I wish you good-

night, and thank you for being a kind friend in the past. I hope, as you say, that things will be cleared up; but if they never are, I'm not going to believe anything bad of the child I've watched grow up from well-nigh a baby." And taking Esther by the arm, she drew her away from the room, and so hastened her preparation that in ten minutes more the gate of Uplands had closed behind them.

Frances heard that Esther was going, and some better feeling urged her almost to the point of disclosing all—but *only* almost! "I wish I had told at first," she said to herself. "It seemed hard then, but it is much harder now—oh, I cannot, I cannot! And Esther has Mrs. Greenway to stand up for her, but I know my father and mother wouldn't have anything to say for me if I got turned away."

It was not strange, therefore, that she tried to escape bidding her friend and companion good-bye, feigning some sudden business in the scullery; but the cook's voice, calling out "Frances, Frances! here's Esther going away," made itself heard above the clatter of plates and dishes, and she was obliged to

emerge from her hiding-place, and meet the gaze of those gentle sorrowful eyes.

"My aunt is taking me away because Mrs. Farley cannot trust me, Frances," said the girl. "I am very sorry; I have been so happy here, and I hoped to stay always."

"Oh, you'll get something better," said Frances, with assumed carelessness. "It's a good place enough, but awfully dull. *I've* had about as much as I want of it, so you need not be surprised if you hear I'm leaving too at my month's end."

"Well, I'm sure!" exclaimed the cook, who was standing by; "to hear you talk one might fancy you were a servant worth the having. I don't know what's come over you, Frances Carter, of late—you're not a bit the girl you were for work, and you seem that set up there's no bearing with you!"

Little, indeed, did she or anyone else beneath that roof know how great a change had come over the girl who, so short a time before, had had no graver fault than the faults of her age, when no careful training had been given her at home. It was the change from innocence to guilt, from tenderness to dulness of

conscience; it was the change which must always follow upon sin unconfessed and so unforgiven, and which makes itself apparent in recklessness and hardness, even of the face and tone.

"Well, good-night to all of you," said Mrs. Greenway, who was growing impatient. "Come along, Esther—do."

"Good-bye, my girl," said the cook; "and I'm sorry enough you're leaving us."

They had walked some moments in silence before Mrs. Greenway addressed her niece. "Esther, my dear," she exclaimed, and her voice trembled, "this is the first and last I'm going to say, not being one for 'nagging' and casting things up. Don't tell me I'm wrong in believing you're an honest girl!"

"Aunt Alice, you are *not* wrong," was the reply. "I know it looks bad and black against me, and I know too I can't tell out anything to clear me; perhaps I shall *never* be cleared at all. But I've done nothing while I was at Mrs. Farley's that I'm afraid for God to have looked down on—and He knows the truth."

"That's enough for me," said Mrs. Green-

way stoutly. "Keep up heart, my dear, and never mind what they think. It's strange, though, that a good Catholic lady like Mrs. Farley should not take your word same as I can; and she's reckoned kind-hearted to every one."

"It does seem strange," and Esther's tone was mournful; "but yet I suppose even very good people can't shut their eyes to what *looks* like truth, though it isn't. Aunt, you won't let this set your mind against Catholics, will you?"

"It won't turn me any the more *towards* them," answered Mrs. Greenway. "Ah me! what would your uncle have said if he'd lived to hear that his own sister's girl was suspected of stealing—it'd most have broken him down, Esther."

"No, aunt; not when he came to think it over," said Esther firmly; "he'd know that if God lets good people think hardly of us and turn ever so much away from being our friends, it is only for a time—just while we're learning that He can comfort us, and make us happy when there's no one else."

"Ah, well, I'm glad if you can see comfort

somewhere, for it's more than I can to-night," responded Mrs. Greenway; "I've a mind to go right away and never see Hammersley again."

"Dear Aunt Alice, don't *think* of it!" exclaimed Esther. "You love the place and you would be miserable away, just as you were before—and it would not make things better. I'd rather stay, even if I've got to bear everyone looking down upon me."

"And *that's* just what seems too much for me," replied Mrs. Greenway. "It's very well for Mrs. Farley to say that she shall tell no one what has led to your leaving Uplands, but things always do leak out one way or other in a little place like this; and if nothing worse is said, it'll be all over the village to-morrow that you've not given satisfaction in your place. And then one and another will come questioning me. I know their ways, having spent near all my life among them—and what am I to say?"

"Say what you think best, dear aunt," said the girl gently; and then, having reached home, they went in, and spoke no further that night of the cloud which had overshadowed them.

When Mrs. Greenway had fallen into a quiet sleep, Esther rose up softly, and, drawing the curtain aside, looked out upon the moon-lit earth. How quiet, how serene seemed this world of ours—the world in which there exist so many joys and sorrows, such happy and such broken hearts, such bright hopes, such deep disappointments ! To the girl the peace of the night seemed a message to tell that there was One watching over all of us, from Whom nothing is hidden ; One Who can pity as no man is able to pity, Who loves as no friend can ever love. The faith of her childhood was strong in her heart, and she knew—yes, *knew*, despite of all outward appearance, that she was not alone, not forsaken. She turned then from the little window to the crucifix on the wall—the one before which James Greenway had spent so many moments snatched from busy toil—and long she prayed—so long that when she rose up from her knees all grief, all bitterness was gone, and her heart held nothing but peace—God's peace.

Mrs. Greenway was proved right in her estimation of the speed with which ill news

travels, especially in a country village. Before the sun had set upon the day following Esther's return to her, she had been questioned and cross-examined as to this sudden change by nearly all the female inhabitants of Hammersley ; and as in every case her response was, "She left because I chose to take her away, and I've no mind for her to be in service any more," the unanimous verdict was that Alice was ruining her girl, and would bitterly repent leading her into a useless "fine-lady" life. But despite Mrs. Farley's silence, it certainly did transpire in some undiscoverable way that Esther had lost favour at Uplands, and "something unpleasant" had led to her aunt's removal of her ; and so by slow degrees, yet sure ones, the poor girl arrived at the uncomfortable consciousness that those who had seemed to like her best grew cool, and those who had found much to say to her in the past, suddenly became so preoccupied when they encountered her that she was not seen, or won only a hasty nod.

The worst of all was, however, that even Father Morton did not seem *quite* the kind, good friend he had ever been ; chilled, perhaps,

by imagining that the girl was not reposing a full confidence in him, and never for a moment guessing that she felt herself bound to silence, even if it cost her the esteem and trust of all her little world.

Never had a brighter summer gladdened the earth; the leaves and blossoms were stirred by only the softest of winds, the sun shone gloriously from out the clear blue of the heavens, yet Esther grew very, very sorrowful.

She was always busy, always observant of her aunt's most trifling wish; but from a glad gay child she grew into a quiet womanly girl, just as some plants grow fast in the grey gloom which succeeds unbroken sunshine.

Sometimes, when the work of the little home was done, she would go by a lonely path at the back of the village, and so reach the shadowy corner of the graveyard where James Greenway was buried, and then she would let the tears fall which it was so hard to keep repressed in Mrs. Greenway's presence, and then, too, she would wish—ah, how vainly!—that he was back again, to stand by her through this time of trouble, which was almost

harder to bear than a sharp storm, because it was so persistent, so tedious !

In truth, the lesson which the young girl had to learn was a very difficult one—difficult at any time of life. She must learn the fleeting character of human esteem, the worthlessness of even the regard we believe most faithful ; she must learn to be a little like Him Who had none to comfort Him ; to understand in a measure the mystery of the Cross, and the value of shame which is sinless in the sight of Heaven.

One little consolation, however, was not withdrawn from her—the fond affection of Alice Greenway.

“ Ah, child ! I’m something like an old dog,” she said once, when Esther was expressing her sense of this constant loving trust. “ I’ve a sharp word and way, but my bark is worse than my bite ! And an old dog never turns from the hand that’s fondled him ; he’ll be faithful through thick and thin. It’s many a blessing and happiness your little hand has brought me, Esther dear, and I should be but a poor-spirited creature to join them who—though they say nothing—are against you !”

So the weeks passed on, and the girl who had once been a sort of "village darling" began to wear a wan, unnatural look, as of one who knew both sleepless and tearful nights. She was not the first, nor—God pardon us who have it at our door!—will she be the last, whose life has been embittered, stunted, perhaps cut short, by unmerited suspicion.

All this time she had heard nothing concerning her former companion, Frances Carter; but towards the close of August Mrs. Greenway heard that she had given up her place in the Uplands kitchen to another young girl from the Catholic school, and that she had obtained some situation up in London, the prospect of which caused her the greatest delight.

Esther listened silently to this piece of news when her aunt related it, and added her comments upon the harm which might ensue; but a resolution came into her heart to make an appeal to Frances—the first appeal she had ever thought of—to acknowledge her fault now that she was leaving Hammersley. "I will try and meet her some day," she decided; but when this seemed impossible to accomplish,

she wrote a little note, saying in a few words that she would like to speak to Frances, and bid her good-bye.

Had she but seen the expression which Frances bore as she read those three or four brief lines, she would have hoped little indeed from the proposed meeting; as it was, however, her face wore a brighter look all day, and she said to herself:

“If I may only tell Aunt Alice and Father Morton, only prove that I *am* fit to be trusted and believed in, I do not mind all the rest. Surely Frances will grant me *that*—it is not very much to ask her after this long time, and I know neither of *them* would let her secret go farther.”

But then there came to Esther's mind the remembrance of the other girl's promise to tell her offence to the priest—a promise she never supposed had not been kept.

“Father Morton must know all this time I am not guilty,” she thought, “and yet he seems so cold, so almost displeased. Ah, perhaps it is because he saw I was so fond, so much too fond of people caring for me! Perhaps it is for my soul's good that he wishes

me to live for a time under suspicion—yes, even feigning to suspect me himself !”

And then she prayed again—how earnestly God only knows—for grace to bear the burden with which she was weighted.



CHAPTER XI.

AT LAST !

IT was Sunday afternoon when Frances Carter chose to answer Esther's humble little note in person ; she suddenly appeared at the lodge-gate, very smartly attired, and with a pert nod to Mrs. Greenway, who was standing at her door, inquired if Esther could take a walk with her.

It surprised Alice that her niece should be so ready, nay, almost eager, to accede to this proposition.

"Don't be away long," she said, as the girls went off together.

Now that the opportunity had really come, Esther felt very much afraid of saying what had been in her mind ; she was rather glad than sorry that her companion spent so much

time in dilating upon the cheerfulness of being in London service, and they had turned in the direction of home before she ventured a few trembling words, standing on the bridge which passes over a quiet little stream near Hammersley, and with her eyes bent upon the long shivering rushes at the water's edge.

"Frances," she said, "it seems a long time, and it has been a very unhappy time, since I left Uplands. I don't suppose you have thought of me so often as I have been thinking and praying about you."

"Oh, it was very foolish of your aunt to take you away like that!" cried Frances hastily. "Such a fuss about nothing! and Mrs. Farley would never have let out a word against you. I know people have got it into their heads you left for some great fault, but you can't blame me for that, Esther. It was all your aunt's doing."

"I have never blamed you for it," said Esther gravely. "I don't think I have minded so much that they fancy in the village I am in some disgrace; what I do mind is not being able to tell Aunt Alice, and that is why I wanted to see you so much. You will let me

make her quite happy by knowing I had nothing to do with the money—won't you, Frances? You are going away in a week's time, and even if you stayed on here, she would never tell a soul."

"Well, I do believe that you are the most selfish girl that ever lived!" exclaimed Frances. "Here is your aunt as fond of you as can be, and only angry with everyone who doesn't believe you a piece of perfection; and you would really go and bring up all that old dead-and-gone story, and take away my character, just for the sake of making her praise you up more than ever! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, pretending, as you do, to be so over-pious."

"Oh, Frances!" and Esther's tone told a little of the pain she felt. "Can you speak to me so, when to save you I have let everyone believe me at least capable of stealing? You call it an 'old dead-and-gone story,' but it isn't that for me; it has spoiled my life, in a way. And though my aunt is so good to me, I know what a trouble it is to her when the Hammersley people pass me by, as they often do."

“And they would not think better of you for your just telling Mrs. Greenway. I suppose what you *really* want is for me to walk round the village and say, ‘I am a thief, and Esther is a saint; she has let herself be suspected all this time to save me.’”

“I want nothing like that,” said the younger girl. “If Mrs. Farley knew I was innocent, I should be very glad of course; but all I *ask* is leave to tell my aunt—and, oh! might I say something to Father Morton?”

“Yes—exactly as I thought!” cried Frances. “Mrs. Farley, your aunt, Father Morton—and so it would run on from one to the other. You gave me your word, Esther; and if you break it, you will be ever so much more wicked than me—yes, ever so much. And you’ll ruin my character, and drive me from one bad thing to another.”

“Oh, Frances, don’t talk so!” and the tears stood in Esther’s eyes. “I’d rather bear all the unhappiness, and more too, than drive you to do anything wrong. I know I made a solemn promise. Sometimes I wonder if I ought to have done it; but it *is* done, and I’ll

keep it—unless you give me leave just to tell my aunt.”

“And I will not—neither now nor any other time,” said Frances, in a low tone of exceeding bitterness. “I’ve got a chance before me of doing well for myself, and I’m not going to have it spoiled by your silly, babyish whims. If you’d been *accused*, Esther—if they’d threatened to punish you, I’d have spoken out well ; but just to let them fancy *perhaps* you did a thing isn’t much.”

“It seems a good deal to me,” said poor Esther.

“Well, and who have you to thank but yourself ? It lay between us, and I was just as likely to be suspected as you ; only when we were called up to the drawing-room, you made such a fool of yourself. To see you colouring and stammering was enough to prove you guilty. I’m sure if you’d made off with a hundred pounds, you couldn’t have looked much worse.”

“Well, never mind talking of how I looked,” and Esther spoke in a dreary tone of hopelessness. “You will not do what I ask you ?”

"No. What then?" was the reply.

"What then?" and the thoughtful eyes, which had all this time been fixed on the rippling water, were turned now on Frances Carter's face. "Nothing—except that I shall try and love you more, and pray for you whenever I pray for myself. And I will be content for God to be the only One Who knows the truth."

"All right," said Frances lightly; "you may pray as much as you like; it'll save me doing it for myself—not that I take up my time with those sort of things. I suppose, if you've nothing else to say, you don't mind going the rest of the way home by yourself? There's someone else I want to see."

"No; I would rather. I should like to go into the church a little while."

"Ah! to enjoy thinking yourself a sort of half-martyr," and Frances laughed. "Well, good-bye, Esther. If ever you are inclined to shake off your strait-laced notions, and come up to get your living in London, I'll do my best to help you. That shows I'm willing enough to be friendly."

"Thank you, Frances, but I'm not very

likely to wish to live in London. My aunt would never let me."

"And you mean to be tied to her apron-strings all your life? Well, I'm not like you, so good-bye."

"Good-bye, Frances," said Esther quietly. "I hope you will be happy in London—and that you won't forget God there," she added softly, as she turned away.

In a few minutes Esther had reached Uplands, and the little chapel adjoining the house wherein she had been such a blithe young servant. She knew the door would be unlocked, and, pushing it open, she went in.

It was growing dusky, but the red lamp burned out like a little star shining in honour of its Lord, concealed within the Tabernacle. Esther found no one there; she was alone with God, and glad to know Him there, to pour out before Him that which she feared to tell to any human ear. It seemed all too soon that she must rise and go away to the little house where her Aunt Alice waited for her, and back to the same life which had grown heavy and drear from the shadow which hung over it.

Perhaps from that day she grew still more grave and silent, more absorbed in her own thoughts ; but she tried still to force a smile to satisfy Mrs. Greenway, who noted anxiously how thin she grew, and how her face became delicate of hue, and so like her mother's when she lay ill in London.

"Are you in any pain, child?" the poor woman would say, after a long pause of sorrowful pondering. "You are not your old self, Esther ; but perhaps the doctor would do you good."

"I don't feel any pain, and the doctor could not make me better, dear Aunt Alice," the girl would answer. "Please don't be so troubled about me. I shall do very well."

"*Very well !*—and getting like a shadow !" cried Mrs. Greenway. "If there's anything fretting you, Esther, why don't you tell me?"

"I am not fretting, aunt ; I am happier than I used to be when I first left Uplands. And, indeed, it would be very ungrateful if I *were* to fret, when I have you to love me, and—well, other things to make me quite content."

Mrs. Greenway knew without any telling

what were these "other things" which brought Esther peace. Though she made no comment, she was quick to observe all that this girl—so dear to her—might do; and often as the patient eyes turned to the Crucifix, or to the picture on the wall of Christ the Cross-bearer, her own would fill with tears.

She knew, too, that the well-worn copy of the "Imitation of Christ," which always had its place in Esther's work-basket, was a sort of silent companion to her. Once she had turned its leaves, and came upon one so tear-stained that it made her marvel; and, difficult as reading was to her, she had spelt out one passage marked with a pencil-line, which said, "Suffer Me to do with thee what I will; I know what is best for thee;" and even *she* could understand that to the girl this sounded as a message from God above.

And as Alice Greenway noted and thought over all these things, many a deep lesson was sinking into her heart. She was learning what all else in her life had failed to teach her—even that nothing but a true religion can be a strong staff enough to support us when the road of life grows rough and steep.

She began to seek conversation about Catholic doctrine, instead of avoiding it—to ask her young niece to read to her from one or other of the few spiritual books which Esther possessed; and in this way she saw more plainly the nature of sin, and saw, too, how death and misery had come after it, but that by Christ's sacrifice all the sting of it had been taken away. And as she listened again and again to the story of Calvary, a dim consciousness crept into her mind, which was as the foreshadowing of perfect daylight; and she wondered if, after all, it might not be a safe and a blessed thing to bear the Cross with Jesus, so that afterwards it might turn into a bright and glorious crown.

It was at this time, too, that she began to go with Esther to Mass on Sunday, and now and then to the Thursday evening Benediction; she even drew forth from some hidden corner the rosary which had been given her in the early days of her widowhood, and, learning its use and its help, began to offer up her *Paters* and *Aves* for one or another need—often for the health and life of the one being dear to her now in the world.

Winter passed by, and it was spring again—bleak March weather, the dust blown in eddying circles by the north-east wind. It often happened now that Esther was shut up within the lodge for days, as Mrs. Greenway had at last insisted on having advice about that low worrying cough and constant weary languor; and the village doctor recommended care, and spoke hopefully of the beneficial influence of warm weather, yet went away to remark, ‘I shall be surprised if the girl lives out May.’

Mrs. Farley came sometimes to see her, and still more often sent wine and other things likely to do her good; and Father Morton, also, was a kind and a frequent visitor. But still Esther felt that some painful doubt made, as it were, a gulf between these good friends and her—a gulf which nothing but a frankness she might not show would completely bridge over.

“Can you tell me nothing about that matter before you left Uplands?” the priest would say, and the answer was always the same, yet the expression of the face which turned to him was innocent and sweetly patient. “I feel sure there is someone she

is trying to screen," he said to Mrs. Farley. "It is not possible for a girl like Esther to keep up a long deception. We must wait, and meanwhile believe her blameless. But it pains me to see that she withholds her confidence from me and from everyone."

It was that same withholding of confidence which formed the barrier Esther could not fail to perceive; it was that, also, which seemed suddenly to chill Mrs. Farley into reserve when she was talking most kindly to the sick girl. Esther tried to accept it as a little part of the cross laid upon her. How could she murmur, indeed, at anything when, in her aunt Alice's changed habits and ways, there was such a wealth of comfort and of hope?

Holy Week came—for Lent fell early that year—and, cold though it was, Mrs. Greenway could not refuse Esther's entreaty to go to some of the services in the chapel. She even felt a desire to have her by her side, for who could tell if this were not the last time they spent this season together? There were, we will hope, many whose hearts were stirred up to love and serve God when they listened to Father Morton telling of the Heart of Jesus,

which was rent with anguish for every one of them, which had suffered more by the ingratitude of creatures than the physical torture of those last cruel days on earth. But it was on Good Friday that a sermon was preached which was to fall with intensest power on Mrs. Greenway's ears; a stranger was in the pulpit, and the unaccustomed voice first riveted her attention, for it was so low, so clear, so earnest. It seemed as if this priest was telling a story, because his words were as simple as if only a group of the Hammersley school-children had been gathered round him. It was indeed the story of so long ago, yet one which is ever fresh and new—the most wonderful story that can reach the ears and the heart of listening man or woman.

Was it so very strange that Alice Greenway should suddenly accept and believe that which was already quite familiar? Ah! no; for it is so often God's way to let a lightning-flash of truth illumine the mind. Sitting there by Esther's side, then, all doubt, all difficulty, all indifference passed from this woman for ever; she saw herself sinful, yet within reach of a grace which could do away with the misery

and the risk of sin ; she felt herself ignorant, yet within reach of a Teacher that could never be puzzled, never mistaken ; she owned herself cold and loveless, yet believed in the love which would pardon all.

Not with Alice Greenway was it as with those who, being ignorant and untaught, are filled with a vague yearning for a holiness they know not how to strive for ; she had learned the whole doctrine of truth, and now that *desire* came, she was well aware what she had to do.

A whispered word of inquiry convinced her that Esther could wait awhile, and so, when nearly everyone had gone home from that morning service, she went to the sacristy and asked if Father Morton could speak to her. He was easily found, and a few words convinced him that the time long waited for had come, that God had conquered the heart which had been cold for years to His pitying, patient love. He could see that there was no room at this moment for hesitation, that Mrs. Greenway was ready to do all which before seemed most impossible, and he willingly agreed to her

proposal to be then and there made a member of Christ's Church.

Meanwhile, Esther had guessed the whole. Her prayers and the prayers of her much-loved uncle James had been heard after long waiting, and "Aunt Alice had been won at last."

Even that very morning, as they went in together to the little building, she had asked that her aunt might not go away without some special blessing; but she had often offered such petitions before, and nothing very marked had been the result, and so, like many more of us, she had almost ceased to look for the answer because it had been delayed so long.

Kneeling again, she prayed with an intensity of earnestness; she thanked Him Whose strong resistless grace had swept away the obstacles which had seemed so hard to displace; and it was only when her aunt came quietly up, and signified that it was time to go home, that Esther had finished all that her heart found to pour out in the presence of Christ.

When the octave of Easter came, Mrs. Greenway knelt at the altar to make her first

Communion, which she realized as such a wonderful event in her life, such a wonderful proof of God's pardoning love; but Esther was not by her side.

"I think the happiness has been too much for me," was her own smiling explanation of the sudden weakness which laid her helpless on her bed at the close of Easter Sunday; but neither the doctor nor her friends marvelled very much, for they had expected a sudden cessation of the unreal strength which had kept her up and active during the preceding week. Hers was a disease which often seems to lie dormant awhile, and admits of ease and even hopefulness, only to disappoint at last.

The girl herself seemed in nowise saddened by her state; her intervals of bodily suffering she accepted as an ordeal through which God willed for her to pass—the brief darkness which was the nearest, surest way to final ease and rest. Night after night of fevered sleeplessness never broke down either her patience or her courage; she was always ready to smile upon her questioners, and comfort them with the thought that she was "better."

Mrs. Greenway struggled hard with that

shadowy fear of losing her dear charge and companion which pursued her in all she did, and even coloured her sleeping fancies. She would talk of what they would do in the coming summer even while she saw those thin cheeks wasting day by day, saw that the sweet soft eyes were fading fast, saw that one of the darkest hours in her life lay before her, and that there was no escape from it; but she bravely fought down any betrayal of her grief, lest she might shorten the little time which she and Esther had to spend together.

It was still hard to part, though not hard as if it had been when she could only dimly believe in their future meeting. She began to pray that she might keep Esther with her if only for a few months, or even weeks.

“If you had been happier—if only you had not taken to heart all the trouble which made you leave Uplands,” she cried once, “you might have been well and strong now.”

Esther gave a feeble little sigh at the remembrance of that old sorrow, which had never wholly lost its bitterness.

“No,” she said; “you must not think that, for indeed it is not true. Dr. Marsh says

that I have got my mother's weakness, that I could not have lived to be very old. And it is so much better as it is—yes, though I love you dearly, Aunt Alice.”

There was a little silence, and then the weak voice spoke again.

“It is not very hard—not hard as some might think at my age—lying here with you to care for me, and with so much to thank God for—especially to know you believe that which will help you to bear all the sorrow. Ah ! I often thought it might come when I was dead ; but I have more than I hoped for in knowing you are a Catholic at last, before I have had to go away and leave you.”

“Have you all you wish for ? Is there anything I can get you ?” and Mrs. Greenway looked almost entreatingly at Esther.

“I don't think there is one. Ah ! only if I could see Frances Carter again. We were great friends while we lived together in service at Uplands, as you know, aunt ; and I am a little anxious lest, away among a number of strangers, she may forget what we used to learn together at the school. If she saw me lying here, it might help her to think.”

"I never liked that girl, nor those belonging to her," said Mrs. Greenway; "but if it's to please you, my dear, I'll go to Mrs. Carter and get news of Frances. Whether she'd be able to come down to Hammersley is another matter, and I'm not so sure that she'd care to do it. As far as I know, she's never been near the place since she left it for that situation she boasted so much of."

"No, I suppose not, or we should have heard," said Esther. "It may be only a fancy, Aunt Alice—the sort of foolish fancy that sick people have sometimes—but I seem to think if Frances knew I was dying, and wanted to see her, she wouldn't keep away."

"Well, I'll do my best," was Mrs. Greenway's answer. "But don't say you're dying—don't, child! for it's more than I can bear. You're terribly weak and ill, dear; but please God, He'll not take you yet."

"Perhaps not directly—not in a day, or even in a week; but I think it's coming very near," said Esther. "It need not make us very unhappy, dear Aunt Alice, for we are together; and when I go, God will come nearer, and help you to bear being alone."

"I'll want His help badly," and the woman's voice was broken by her sobs. "Do you remember my coming to London and seeing you first, Esther?"

"Yes," she answered, smiling.

"And do you remember when you first came to Hammersley? Ah! my dear, I knew it was a blessing God had sent me in place of the child I'd longed for as my very own; but still I didn't half know all you'd be to me as years went by."

"They have been happy years," and Esther spoke faintly. "You have been a second mother—such a good, fond mother! I am so glad you can bless God for giving me to you, aunt; but now you have a much greater blessing. He has given you Himself."

The entrance of Father Morton put an end to the conversation. He had come, he said, to see if Esther would like to receive Holy Communion in the morning; so, while he remained to hear her confession, Mrs. Greenway slipped away on her errand to Mrs. Carter's cottage, which was not far off.

When she returned, a neighbour met her at the door. It seemed that Esther had changed

for the worse so suddenly, that Father Morton had hurried off to the church, and was about to return to administer the Last Sacraments.

“Esther! Esther!” cried Alice, in terror, as she bent over the bedside. “Don’t leave me yet. I cannot spare you, I——”

“Oh! let me go. I am happy. All the sorrow has been worth while!” and the girl’s eyes were full of death’s shadow. “Jesus—mercy! Mary—help!” and she was gone—gone like the sunset, which faded into the grey of the evening sky.



CHAPTER XII.

BOUND TOGETHER.

“**F**RANCES doesn't care to come near any of us,” had been Mrs. Carter's response to her neighbour's request ; and from the utter silence which followed the despatch of the letter telling of Esther's death and the wish she had felt to see her former friend, it seemed that the mother's view was a true one.

Up in London among new scenes and new temptations, in a house where she concealed the fact that she bore the name of Catholic, it was not to be supposed that the girl, who had been trained under Father Morton's eye, and afterwards had the help of a Christian life under a pious mistress, could do otherwise than fall grievously away from God. A *clever* servant she might be, but a trustworthy one

never, unless that early offence was duly repented and the temptation to err again combatted by the help of prayer and the Sacraments.

After a while rumours of very unsatisfactory things concerning Frances Carter came down to the little village of Hammersley; but this was several years after Esther's death, and even her own parents had given up all thought of her return to her quiet home, even for a passing visit.

She would never have guessed—poor foolish girl!—how much she was thought of by one person who lived in Hammersley; how often a prayer went up to God for her in the very chapel where she had knelt herself in childhood, where her first Communion had been made—the Communion which would be a memorial *against* her if she stood before God's judgment-seat with a burden of unconfessed, and therefore unrepented, sin.

Even had any inspiration been given her as to this constant remembrance, she must have failed to guess that it lived in the heart of Alice Greenway. She had never spoken to the woman half a dozen times, and those times

had only given her the impression that Alice did not particularly care to have her for Esther's companion.

Such things are hard to explain or to account for, but Mrs. Greenway had guessed Esther's secret at the moment of the expression of that dying wish to see Frances; *she* was bound by no promise, and thus felt at liberty to tell her suspicions to both Father Morton and Mrs. Farley.

She had not one single fact to lay before them, she could tell nothing they had not long known, but even to them the mystery seemed cleared away; and they grieved that judgment should have been so warped, so blinded, and that the awakening had come too late for anything save regret.

Perhaps nothing in the form of duty had ever presented itself to Alice in so hard a guise as the duty of forgiving Frances the wrong done to the dead girl—a wrong which might have left a stronger nature uninjured, but which seemed to have crushed Esther much as a fragile little flower is beaten down by the wind which only bends the hardy ones for a passing moment. But sometimes they

who are slowest to apprehend duty are firmest in obeying when its dictates are heard ; and, once convinced that she must forgive, as she hoped to be forgiven, this simple country woman reached that point of virtue which many a good person of higher degree can never attain. She was always wishing for some way of serving and helping Frances. It did not seem very probable that any means of so serving her would be found ; it did not even seem very likely that they two should ever meet again, excepting that, after all, the world is not so very large a place but that we *do* have all kinds and manners of unlooked-for meetings. Nevertheless, Alice, in praying for this erring soul, always asked that her wish might be granted her, and always expected also that, sooner or later, she should find that she had not made this petition in vain.

Five times had the pleasant sounds and sights of summer come round since Mrs. Greenway saw Esther die, five times the snows and rains of winter had fallen upon pretty Hammersley, and no news had come of Frances Carter, no sign that she had ever

heard of or shed a tear for the death of the girl she had wronged. There had been changes in the village. Some of the inhabitants had moved away, some were married, some were dead; but Alice still occupied the lodge which had been her home so long, and filled up her time by needlework and other "odd jobs," as she called them, by which she was making a nice little store of money against the coming of old age.

She had fancied that when Esther went she could not live long, but she was mistaken. We often are mistaken as to what things we can suffer and endure, yet they shall not prove fatal; surely there must be some very stout, strong element in all our hearts, some wondrous power of elasticity and rebound!

She was not even unhappy; she grew used to being alone; yet her memory of both husband and niece was fresh and strong in her heart, nor could she speak of either without strong emotion. Perhaps she had learned to be willing to spare them to such blessed safety and rest.

Her Catholic life had gone on surely and swiftly; the truth had not glanced by her

heart and left her character untouched, but, penetrating her whole nature, had worked marvels with its imperfections and polished its rough, sharp corners. She was a gentle-spoken woman now.

The moon was slowly rising one summer evening behind the belt of trees which shut in the "big house" from the view of the lodges, and Alice Greenway came out into her porch for a moment's glance over the quiet scene before closing for the night. The smell of the honeysuckle blossoms always peculiarly reminded her of Esther—the child had been so fond of them—and now, as the strong fragrance came in on the air, she said half aloud:

"Ah! how many a time she's run out to smell them just the last thing, as it might be now! They're sweeter far at dusk than in day."

Perhaps the low sound of her voice had startled some one who lingered by the gate, for certainly there was a rustling in the laurels. It was no fancy.

Alice stood still another minute or two, to make sure that no one who ought not to be

there was lurking about ; she distinctly saw then some woman's figure standing under the shadow of a tree, but on the outside of the gate.

"Perhaps it's some stranger who wants to know the way," she reflected ; and she went forward so quietly, that as she spoke the stranger started violently, and, turning round, stood revealed in the clear moonlight.

Changed a little, older, harder-looking though that face was, Alice knew it in a moment as the face of her lost Esther's early companion, Frances Carter, the girl for whom she had prayed that one day she might do a kindness. Perhaps the opportunity was coming now.

"Frances !" she exclaimed. "You've found your way to Hammersley after all these years, and you've grown into a woman, but I think I should have known you anywhere !"

"More's the pity !" was the response, spoken bitterly, too. "I'd like to go where no one knew me, or remembered so much as my name. I will, too !"

"Come, come—don't say that," replied Mrs. Greenway, kindly. "It's a pleasure to

see those again we've known as children come back to the old place. Will you walk in for a minute or two? I was just going to lock up, for the family are away, and there's nothing to sit up for; but I'd like to hear how you've prospered in London."

"Prospered!" and the girl laughed scornfully, but then, changing her tone, said, "No, I'll not walk in, thank you. I'm going on to the next town, but I thought if I came by this road, I might be overtaken by some cart or other. I'd just stopped to have a look at the Lodge. One does like to take a last look, you know, when one's going far away."

"Going away already? Why, that'll be bad hearing for your mother," said Mrs. Greenway. "When did you come down?"

"Only to-day."

"And away to-night? You're in haste to get to a new situation maybe?"

"I've got no situation now," said Frances. "I want to be away, as anyone would in my place when their own father and mother turn against them. 'I'll not have you darken my door,' said my father to me an hour or two back; and mother—well, she stood by, and

said, ' *We've* heard enough of your goings-on, I can tell you ; there's no home for you here. It's nice speaking for Catholics, isn't it, Mrs. Greenway ?'

" Don't speak against Catholics, for, thank God, I'm one of them. I turned to it just before I lost our Esther. I'm sorry to say it, Frances, but your people have never had the name of *good* Catholics ; and it's no use blaming their religion, for I'm afraid it's little they care about *that*."

" Ah ! well, they'll have nothing to do with me. I thought there was an old saying about ' blood being thicker than water ' as 'd come true for me. I've not been what I ought, and one trouble has come on another, and I've no character now to begin again with ; but I'd never have believed that my own mother would shut the door against me."

" Ah ! my girl, she'll think better of it," and Mrs. Greenway laid her hand on Frances gently. " Don't let it harden you ; don't let it make you feel as if there's no one to care for you. I shouldn't wonder now if your mother isn't listening for your step, and hoping you'll come back."

The girl burst into a mocking laugh, but it was easy to tell that tears lay very, very close behind it.

"It's little you know my mother," she said ; "but even if you were right, she'd listen in vain, for I'd never go back. I've lost my character in service for taking what wasn't mine, but I'd meant to begin again and do better, and that's what brought me down here, away from them that are drawing me on to worse. I don't care now what I do. I must do what I can, and whatever comes of it is the fault of them that turn away from helping me to——"

"There's One Who'll *never* turn from you, my poor girl," said Alice. "Think of Him if you feel cast down and forsaken ; think of all you learned when you were a child, Frances ; and you'll not talk as if it didn't matter what evil you fall into."

"Yes ; and what is the use of thinking ? It won't bring back the past ; it won't give me a home and friends when I want them—as I do to-night."

"You needn't want a friend if you'll take me for one—if you'll let me be a sort of mother

till your own mother thinks better of what she said to you," and Mrs. Greenway tried to hold the girl's hand. "Come and stay the night at least, Frances, and think over what is best to do. There's room enough, though 'tis but a little place. It's often seemed empty enough since God took Esther."

Frances had not allowed the gentle grasp which sought to detain her. She had jerked herself free of it when Mrs. Greenway began to speak, but at the sound of the last few words she walked a few paces off.

"Esther!" she cried. "Ah! it's more than I can bear to hear you talk of *Esther*!"

"More than you can bear!" repeated Alice, slowly. "Ah, child! if you'd known how she thought of you, how she wished to see you again, you'd like to hear me speak of her. You'd like, maybe, to hear how happy she was towards the end, though she'd been sorely troubled when first she left Mrs. Farley."

"She did not mind so much then that people fancied something against her?" and Frances Carter's tone was almost eager. "I'm glad of that."

"No; she grew not to mind, feeling as if

it brought God nearer," said Alice, simply. "I've missed her sorely, Frances, and perhaps through thinking of her so much, I've got to wish what she did. Many and many a day I've been thinking how glad I'd be to see you, and to do something for you. When I tell you that, you'll make up your mind to stay with me till to-morrow, my dear."

There was a brief hesitation, and then, with a burst of tears, the answer came which Mrs. Greenway wanted to hear. It was a reluctant—nay, almost a sullen "Yes;" but she led Frances into her snug home, and made much of her, as if she had been some favourite child returned after long and wearying absence.

"And now you'll be ready for bed," she said, when the girl had taken some food; but Frances shook her head.

"I'll not lie down till I've told you that which perhaps will make you turn against me," she said; and so it was that Alice listened to the story of the early sin which had laid her own Esther under suspicion, and of many and many another sin which had followed such a beginning.

"And now you'll not want any more to do with me," said the girl, in conclusion. "You won't turn me out to-night, I know, for it's grown late while we've been talking; but it'll be hard for you to bear to have me here till day breaks, now you see the wrong I did to Esther."

There was no answer for a moment.

"Ah! I see I'm right!" cried Frances, starting up. "I'll go at once. It's summer, and scarce night at all; and if I get tired, it's warm enough to sleep outdoors, and——"

But Mrs. Greenway's arm had drawn her back, and it was with a kiss such as a good mother might have given that she was made to feel herself welcome even before the words came.

"It's God Who brought you here to-night, my dear, and with all my heart I thank Him."

It did not take many days for the Hammersley people to find out that some one was staying at the Lodge with Alice Greenway. Very soon afterwards it was discovered, in some unexplainable method, that this "some

one" was the Carters' daughter, whom *they* had long disowned.

But this nine days' wonder was succeeded by a still greater wonder. Some one else might succeed to that much-envied post of lodge-keeper to the "big house," for Alice was going away, though where to no one could make her say, excepting that it was "north."

The fact of the case was, that Frances was fully determined not to remain in a place where so much was known to her discredit, and Mrs. Greenway was as fully determined not to let her wander away alone; so they were bound for a busy town far away from Hammersley, where work was plentiful for all who had willing hands.

"I thought you would live and die in Hammersley," said Mrs. Farley, when she came to inquire what all these rumours might mean. "I don't like you to leave us, Alice—to leave the friends of a lifetime and the place where your husband and Esther are buried. And you are growing old apace; you will by-and-by want familiar faces near you more than ever."

"Ma'am," said Alice, "I've thought it over

every single thing you tell me ; but my mind is none the less made up. It goes hard to leave the place, but then it would be harder to see this poor girl go astray, as she might if she were left to herself. I've been a useless sort of creature to Almighty God this long time, and now He's given me something—right into my hands, as I may say—to do for Him, I'll not fail Him. Frances seems to have a liking for me to be near her, and there's no knowing but I may get her to think of Him Who put it in my heart to care for her."

"But suppose she disappoints you, Alice—suppose she leaves you in that strange place, when you have sacrificed your little home and all else for her? I am afraid there is nothing very good to be expected from any of the Carters. From all I hear, Frances has brought shame on her religion and early school-training already, and she seems perfectly hardened and careless."

"Ah! ma'am, it's only *seeming*," said Alice. "Like many another, she's trying to hold out against our blessed Lord; but it'll not last. Once away from here, I feel sure she'll come

round to better things ; but she'll need some one to bear with her kindly."

"I do not like it to fall upon you," replied Mrs. Farley. "I wish you would think over it again, and do be advised by our good priest, Alice."

"I'm going to see him this very night," said Alice. "There's things I could say to him I would not feel it wise to tell others, and I believe when he's heard all, he'll not blame me. Ah ! Mrs. Farley, I'm but a poor, untaught woman ; I never was sharp and clear-sighted as some are ; but I'm pretty sure it's God that's spoke to me now, and asked me to take Frances Carter, as it were, in Esther's place."

Years went by, and in one busy northern town there were few indeed among its Catholic inhabitants who were not familiar with the faces of two women who were constant in their attendance at most of the services of the Church. One was old, the other younger by a great deal, yet always sadder and graver of aspect. *She* spent hours before the Tabernacle kneeling on the floor near the threshold, and was often seen to weep bitterly, as if in her

past there was much to repent of, or some wound which could never in this world be entirely healed. It was generally supposed that they were mother and daughter, but one or two, who knew more of them than mere sight could tell, said that there was no relationship between the two ; that they had lived in the same Kentish village, and were bound together only by the tie of loving some long-dead girl, of whom they spoke (and even now with tears in their eyes) as " Our Esther." •

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